

## Not surprising

I can appreciate the experiences of the Libby High School students who have been queried or chided by students elsewhere about the asbestos problem.

I'm sure all of us in the Libby area can.

Last month, I was in Coeur d'Alene on business and was sitting in my car in front of the hotel waiting for my wife. An older gentleman had just turned over his car to the valet when he stopped and asked me where 56 county was in Montana.

I told him Libby, not thinking Troy or Eureka. I assumed he was asking where I was from.

"Oh," he said. "I thought it was Thompson Falls."

He walked around my vehicle and then poked his head in the passenger side window and said, "Isn't that where everyone is dying?"

Inwardly, I groaned and told him not quite. I explained that workers at the old mine were turning up sick and that they brought home the asbestos dust and contaminated family members. I also mentioned the medical screening process and how more affected people were being discovered.

The whole conversation took a few seconds.

"Well, it doesn't sound like a good place to take a vacation," he said. He turned and entered the hotel leaving me writhing in agony.

We have a lot of work to do Libby.

We have people finding out something is wrong with them. In some cases, it's not asbestos-related but it will be shocking and could be devastating to those people.

And we will be adding more people to the number of residents already diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. We knew that before the screenings began.

We need to work together to make sure we clean up the community, we need to give the EPA some space to finish testing homes so they can determine whether or not the insulation in our homes and buildings is a health hazard. We need to make sure we have adequate health facilities, care and doctors to serve the impacted portion of our population while at the same time handle the everyday health needs of a community this size.

Also, we need to form a committee to work on the reputation and promotion of this community as a health environment to live in, visit and invest in.

We need to work together.

While that may seem obvious, we're looking quite a bit ragged around the edges in several areas of cooperation. — Roger Morris

Feb 28, 01

News

Western

# Martz seeks more federal assistance

## Governor calls screening results a wake-up call for action

By **ROGER MORRIS**  
Western News Publisher

The health screening results in Libby are a wake-up call for government to take further emergency steps immediately, said Montana Gov. Judy Martz in a letter last week to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus.

Martz was scheduled to be in Washington, D.C., last weekend for the National Governor's Conference and planned to visit with Baucus, U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns and U.S. Rep. Dennis Rehberg about the Libby issue.

"This is devastating news for Libby but it is a wake-up call for the federal government and all of us to take further emergency steps immediately," Martz said in her letter to Baucus. "I am writing you today (Feb. 22) to urge you to do everything you can to bring more help to Libby. There are many needs that will not be filled by EPA

programs.

"Economic impacts will likely exceed the dollars currently allocated."

Martz said she was calling on Baucus, Burns and Rehberg to make sure the federal government addresses the damage that can be mitigated.

"The little town of Libby has paid a heavy price collectively, individually, financially and personally," she wrote. "We must not allow further devastation to continue under our watch.

"We must fill in the gaps where needs can be identified."

Martz mentioned that she sent Gail Gray, director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services to the Community Advisory Group on Feb. 22 to "convey our administration's commitment to making sure Libby knows that the tragedy they face

daily belongs to all of us."

Martz continued, "We will not leave it to someone else to address. We will not hope that things work out. We will make sure that they do."

Martz' letter also said that 627 people tested positive for asbestosis out of 1,078 people for a contamination rate of 58 percent.

The next day, an aide in Helena reported the governor did not have the report released by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, who is conducting the health screenings. The ATSDR report showed that 30 percent of the 1,078 participants in the medical screening had lung abnormalities and 19 percent of that group had abnormalities consistent with asbestos exposure.

Baucus, who is scheduled to visit Libby within the next month according to a field representative,

responded almost immediately.

"If anything calls for an effective, coordinated federal, state and local response, this is it," the senator wrote.

Baucus said he will work with the Montana congressional delegation and Martz "in providing economic, environmental and health assistance to ensure that the residents of Libby and Lincoln County receive the help they need to make their homes and community safe for them, their children and grandchildren."

Baucus said he will continue to oppose legislation that limits asbestos victims' ability to file suit against W.R. Grace, who mined the asbestos-tainted vermiculite near Libby. He said he will also ensure that any tax benefit Grace receives to avoid bankruptcy will be "stored away and earmarked specifically for victims."

# EPA to be aggressive testing for tremolite in Libby area homes

The EPA will resume testing homes for tremolite asbestos fibers using a three-pronged approach, said Paul Peronard, the agency's on-site coordinator in Libby.

The agency has selected a dozen homes for the aggressive sampling.

First, occupants will wear air monitors as they move around in their homes so testers can determine the exposure level from a normal day, Peronard said.

"In the second scenario, we move the people out and we put monitors on our people," he said. "We'll stir up the dust. It will be a worst-dust scenario, as if you're a manic cleaner."

Finally, testers will go into attics and simulate a home remodeling project. They'll be in direct contact with the insulation while the monitors pick up the amount of asbestos fibers.

While the attic insulation is being disturbed, other monitors placed in the main living space will also take readings.

"This should answer the question: 'do you spread fibers to the rest of the house when you're remodeling?'" Peronard said.

The EPA will test both houses of former vermiculite mine workers and homes where no mine workers have ever lived. The tremolite

asbestos contaminated vermiculite was once mined nearby.

Testing will move outdoors to garden spots in the spring, where the EPA will use the same three-step approach.

Results from the latest home testing should be known by May, Peronard said.

"Our goal is to have the whole model done by the end of summer, early fall," he added.

For much of the last year, the EPA has been upgrading the way it counts and quantifies asbestos fibers. When it became apparent that the microscopes that laboratories traditionally use for insulation and soil samples were producing inconsistent data, the federal agency decided to upgrade its technology with a scanning electron microscope that can fine-tune the results.

The agency is building a predic-

tive model by which to measure asbestos contamination. But the waiting and not knowing has been frustrating for many Libby residents.

In the meantime, officials instructed Libby residents not to disturb attic insulation. Several remodeling projects have been put on hold.

*From Lynnette Hintze of the Kalispell Daily Inter Lake.*

## Baucus urges Whitman to visit Libby on April 11

U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) asked EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman to attend an April 11 Libby field hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works committee to discuss the needs of those exposed to asbestos and cleanup efforts from the now-defunct W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

Baucus is a senior member of the committee and held a field hearing in Libby in January 2000, which was attended by Montana's Republican Senator Conrad Burns.

Baucus expressed concern that 30 percent of a small number of medical screening participants had lung abnormalities.

"This is a percentage that is alarming to me personally," he wrote to EPA chief Whitman in a Feb. 26 letter. "We need to do all we can to ensure that Libby gets a clean bill of health. Your atten-

dance is critical to ensure that the federal, state and local cleanup efforts are on target."

Last summer, Baucus and Burns helped secure additional federal funds for the EPA to expand its cleanup operation in Libby. The community continues to require additional help for the long-term clean up that will be required of W.R. Grace and the EPA, Baucus said.

Also, Baucus wrote to the Senate Judiciary Committee's top members - Chairman Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and ranking member Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt) - that he opposes a proposed amendment to a bankruptcy reform bill (S. 220) that would shield asbestos companies from paying punitive damages to victims of asbestos-related diseases. He said he would stage a filibuster on the Senate floor over the issue.



# PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that a public meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 7, 2001, at 7:00 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall. The purpose of the meeting shall be the consideration by the Board of Lincoln County Commissioners to adopt the following resolution. At the meeting the Board of Commissioners will accept public comment on this resolution. Comments can also be sent to the Board of County Commissioners, 512 California Avenue, Libby, Montana 59923 or e-mailed to [lccomms@libby.org](mailto:lccomms@libby.org). For further information or for a copy of the draft resolution please contact Bill Bischoff, Executive Assistant at (406) 293-7781, ext. 201 or e-mail at [billb@libby.org](mailto:billb@libby.org).

## Draft Resolution

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF LINCOLN COUNTY, MONTANA TO COMMENCE BEFORE THE BOARD A PROCEEDING TO INVESTIGATE: (1) THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF ANY ADVERSE IMPACTS ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY, OR THE ENVIRONMENT, AND ON THE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPUTATION OF THE COMMUNITY IN LINCOLN COUNTY THAT MAY BE PRESENTED BY OR THAT MAY HAVE ARISEN OR MAY BE ARISING FROM THE CONTAMINATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT WITH TREMOLITE ASBESTOS IN AND AROUND THE CITY OF LIBBY; (2) THE NEED, IF ANY, FOR LEGISLATIVE OR EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENTAL ACTION AT THE COUNTY LEVEL TO ABATE ANY ENDANGERMENTS THAT MAY BE PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY, OR THE ENVIRONMENT ARISING OUT OF SUCH CONTAMINATION; (3) THE AVAILABLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF PARTIES WHO ARE OR MAY BE LIABLE FOR THE COST OF ANY SUCH CONTAMINATION ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY OR THE ENVIRONMENT; AND (4) THE NEED FOR THE COUNTY TO SEEK LEGISLATIVE OR EXECUTIVE ACTION AT THE STATE OR FEDERAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO APPROPRIATELY RESPOND, EITHER ALONE OR IN CONJUNCTION WITH COUNTY ACTION, TO ANY SUCH ENDANGERMENTS THAT MAY BE PRESENTED.

WHEREAS, the mining of vermiculite has been conducted in Lincoln County for more than 70 years; and

WHEREAS, vermiculite has been processed in various locations in and around the City of Libby, in Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, tremolite asbestos is known to be present in and around ore containing vermiculite; and

WHEREAS, a significant number of individuals in Lincoln County have been exposed to asbestiform fibers and have contracted asbestos related diseases including asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma; and

WHEREAS, the number of cases of asbestos related diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma in a community of the size of Lincoln County was sufficiently large to gain the attention of state and federal government agencies responsible for the protection of the environment and the assessment of and development of data bases about adverse impacts on public health from released hazardous substances; and

WHEREAS, in response to concerns over the causes of the significant number of cases of asbestos related diseases in Lincoln County, the United States Environmental Protection Agency ("USEPA") and the Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry ("ATSDR") of the U.S. Public Health Service, and their various environmental consultants have conducted investigations of certain sites and populations in and around Lincoln County where vermiculite was mined and processes; and

WHEREAS, in the performance of these investigations, the presence of tremolite asbestos has been detected at levels that the USEPA determined present a significant threat to the public health, welfare and the environment in and around the City of Libby in Lincoln County; and

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WHEREAS, in an effort to mitigate the most prominent threats to public health, USEPA has undertaken, and continues to pursue, the remediation and removal of tremolite asbestos contaminations from areas in and around certain historic, processing facilities within Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, the ATSDR has studied, and continues to study and assess, the nature and extent of the impacts of both occupational and non-occupational exposure to tremolite asbestos on public health in Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these investigations, the impacts of tremolite asbestos contamination on public health within the County include a mortality rate related to the presence of tremolite asbestos in the community in excess of 6000% of the levels that would be found in communities unaffected by the presence of tremolite asbestos; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these investigations and the discovery of the tremolite asbestos contamination and its toxicity, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has grown increasingly concerned about assuring the adequate protection of public health, safety, welfare, the environment and natural resources within the jurisdiction of Lincoln County from any adverse impacts that have been or may continue to be presented by, or arise out of exposure to, the tremolite asbestos contamination, and the preservation and restoration of the economic vitality of Lincoln County derived from its historic attractiveness as a recreational area and its previous reputation as a healthful residential, commercial and industrial area; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has further become increasingly aware of the inherent limitations on the scope of governmental response that USEPA and ATSDR can provide under current federal law; and

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 3 of the Montana Constitution expressly provides that all persons in Montana have an inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment, which right the Montana Supreme Court in *Montana Environmental Information Center v. Department of Environmental Quality*, 296 Montana 207, 988 P.2d 1236 (1999) has determined to be a fundamental constitutional right of all Montanans and a self executing provision of the Montana Constitution; and

WHEREAS, Article XI, Section 4 of the Montana Constitution vests county government with legislative, administrative and other powers provided or implied by law; and

WHEREAS, it is the inherent authority, fundamental responsibility, and necessary and proper affair of county government to secure, in compliance with such limitations and restrictions as may be prescribed by law, adequate protection of the public health, safety, welfare and the environment of its inhabitants, as well as to take such actions as are permitted by law to protect the fundamental, inalienable rights afforded by the Montana Constitution;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County does hereby establish a legislative proceeding before the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County to investigate the adequacy of existing environmental remedial programs and authorities and to take such action, including legislation at the county level and recommendations to the appropriate state or federal legislative body, as the Board of Commissioners, following consideration of the results of this investigation and input from the public, may deem appropriate;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in light of the extensive public health issues arising from the presence of tremolite asbestos contamination in and around certain parts of Lincoln County, and pursuant to the provisions of Article XI, Section 7(1) of the Montana Constitution, the Board of Commissioners hereby request that the Lincoln County Board of Health attend to and participate in, as appropriate, the investigation to be conducted by the Board of Commissioners pursuant to this Resolution No. ; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that it is necessary and appropriate to the affairs of the county that the scope of the investigation include but not be limited to the nature and source of any tremolite asbestos contamination in and around Lincoln County, potential sources of release of the tremolite asbestos contamination, potential methods to finance the abatement, if needed, of the contamination, the adequacy and sufficiency of enforcement programs and authorities at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of regulatory programs at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of liability programs and financial responsibility requirements at the county, state and federal levels, and the assessment of the adequacy, sufficiency, and limitations of financial resources of those parties who are or may be liable for abating the adverse impacts arising out of the tremolite asbestos contamination, including without limitation, liability insurance and other mechanisms in the private and commercial sector of the community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in order to assist the Board of Commissioners in the conduct of its investigation, the Public Health Unit of the County Attorney's office will provide all necessary and appropriate legal support services to the County Board of Commissioners.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in order to further the purposes of this investigation, the members of the County Board of Health may request that the County Board of Commissioners issue subpoenas requiring attendance of witnesses or production of books or other documents for evidence or testimony in any action or proceeding pending before the County Board of Commissioners.

# Report shows 30 percent with abnormalities

■ Officials say results are 10 times higher than average

By ROGER MORRIS  
Western News Publisher

Federal officials expressed surprise and concern with medical screening results for 1,078 Libby area residents showing nearly one out of three people has a lung abnormality, according to a report released Thursday.

Nineteen percent of the study group are showing signs consistent with asbestos exposure, said Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger in an interim report released by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry during the Community Advisory Group meeting Thursday night.

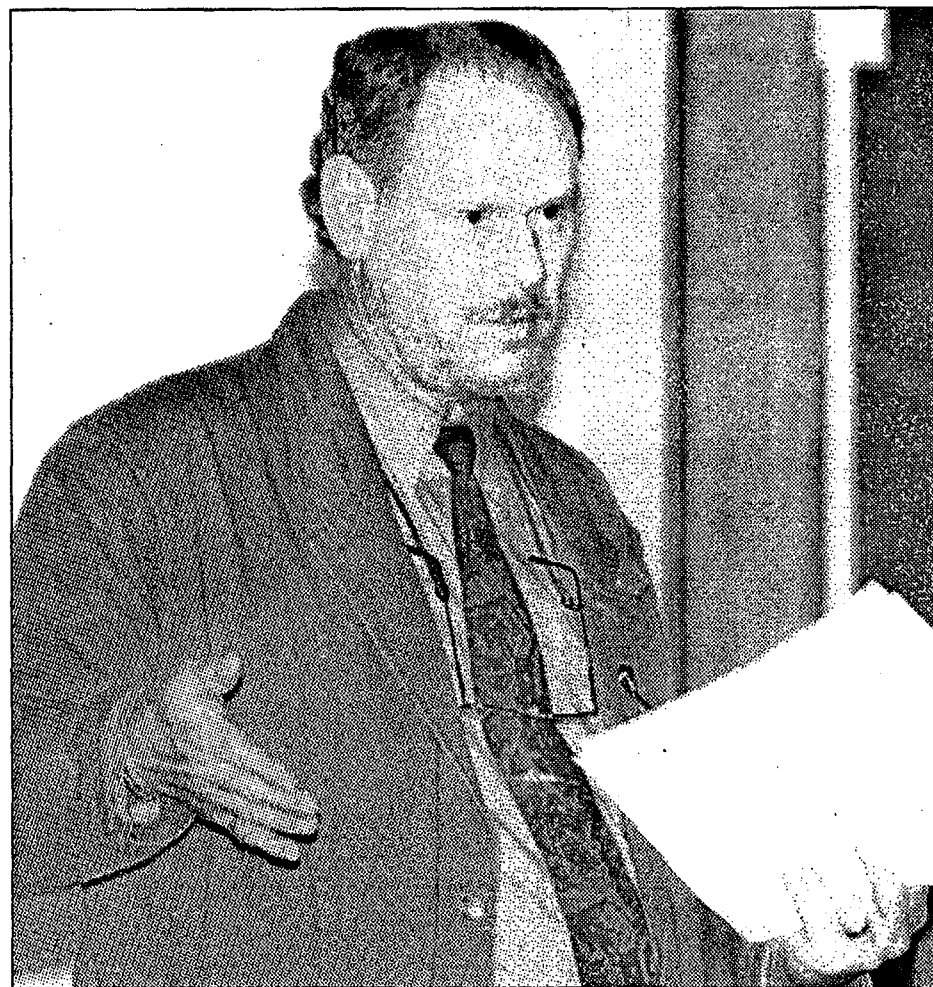
"They are concerning numbers," Lybarger said. "I'm concerned about finding numbers of this magnitude."

Thirty percent or 276 of the people screened have received letters referring them to their physicians for further medical testing because their x-rays have shown scarring of the chest wall by at least one physician. Nineteen percent or 170 had abnormalities seen by at least two of the x-ray B readers.

"It represents a substantial number of people being referred back to their physicians for an abnormality," Lybarger said.

Also, the screening questionnaire shows a significant number of people — 95 percent — reported exposure to the asbestos-tainted vermiculite, once mined by W.R. Grace, northwest of Libby and processed on the edge of town.

Answers to the screening questionnaire show that out of the 1,078 people in the interim report, 127 were former Grace



Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry explained the analysis of medical screening results for 1,078 people living in the Libby area.

employees or contractors for services to the former mine; 116 people had work-related contact with the vermiculite; 177 were household members of Grace employees; 558 had recreational contact either by playing in the vermiculite piles; playing on the youth baseball fields near the expansion plant, popping raw vermi-

culite at home or hiking in the Rainey Creek area, where it was mined. Thirty-four people reported vermiculite insulation in their homes and 53 had no known exposure to vermiculite.

Lybarger said 49 percent of the

See **Abnormalities** on Page 8

## The Numbers

- 1,078 people in analysis group
- 159 were less than 18 years old
- 292 were 18-45 years old
- 449 were 45-65 years old
- 178 were 65+ years
- 509 were male
- 569 were female
- 109 males were miners or contractors
- 18 women were miners or contractors
- 43 men had household contact to workers
- 134 women had household contact to workers
- 239 men had recreational contact to vermiculite
- 319 women had recreational contact to vermiculite
- 13 men lived in homes with vermiculite insulation
- 21 women lived in homes with vermiculite insulation
- 81 men had no occupational contact to vermiculite
- 35 women had no occupational contact to vermiculite
- 49% reported smoking cigarettes at one time or another
- 30% had scarring on the chest wall seen by one physician
- 19% had scarring on the chest wall seen by two B readers
- 37% of Grace employees in group had abnormalities
- 20% of household contact with former workers had abnormalities
- 18% of others reporting occupational contact had abnormalities
- 14% of people with vermiculite insulation had abnormalities
- 16% reporting recreational contact to vermiculite had abnormalities
- 14% reporting no apparent exposure to vermiculite had abnormalities

## Abnormalities

Continued from Page 1

participants reported smoking cigarettes at some time during their life.

Of the 127 former W.R. Grace employees and secondary contractors including in the group, 50 percent had lung abnormalities, the largest exposure group of the 1,078. Another significant exposure group was 37 people with abnormalities reported were part of a household

with contact with former Grace employees. The ATSDR report says, "This finding causes concern as it might represent an important historic pathway of exposure to asbestos by community residents."

Testing in another community, without the high exposure rates to asbestos-tainted vermiculite might show lung abnormalities of less than one to three percent, Lybarger said.

"It's big," said Paul Peronard, local EPA coordinator, said of the magnitude of the health problem associated with asbestos exposure. He said he never anticipated it being this widespread.

"You guys have suffered more

than any community I've ever seen," Peronard said.

The EPA was 20 years too late responding to the problem and the agency will never be able to get "ahead of that curve." An EPA internal investigation was trying to determine why the agency didn't respond to problems in Libby in the 1980s when it and the state received information of initial health problems and public exposures to the asbestos-tainted vermiculite.

The medical screening is not a diagnosis and people with abnormalities need to go back to their physician for further evaluation, Peronard said.

"These are things we are report-

ing as abnormalities," Lybarger said. And not all of the abnormalities are asbestos-related, he said.

The results represent 18 percent of the

people that participated in the medical screening last year and Lybarger warned that the "final analysis" of the 6,144 people tested might be different than reported last week.

Previously, Lybarger had released information from a small sampling of test results showing 9-10 percent of the people with lung abnormalities, which was consistent with estimates of local physicians and government officials.

# Hitting close to home

From The Daily Inter Lake

**Amy Jaun**

"My mom was diagnosed yesterday," Amy Jaun said quietly on Friday. "It makes me real angry."

A senior at Libby High School, Jaun has already seen several family members die from asbestos disease.

"I watched my grandma go through all the stages of asbestosis. I've lived with it every day," she said. "I don't want to see anyone else go through it."

Jaun has also watched another grandmother, Gayla Benefield, become an outspoken advocate for asbestos victims.

"My grandma has inspired me a lot by what she's done," she said. "I wish more people understood what's happening, but if they don't live with it, they don't understand. It's made me realize life isn't fair, and that you have to fight to get people to listen."

Jaun will get a chance to tell her story to other students. A Los Angeles television station is featuring her in an educational segment about asbestosis that will be made available in classrooms there.

**Necia Wayland-Smith**

Asbestos disease hit home for sophomore Necia Wayland-

Smith when her grandfather, a former Libby mayor and high-school teacher, was diagnosed with lung disease.

"He grew up in Libby, lived here his whole life, and he never smoked and he never worked at Grace," she said.

Wayland-Smith and all of her family members were tested for asbestos disease.

"It's better to prepare yourself," she said. "I guess you should worry about it, because eventually someone you know will have it. I won't let it get me down, though."

There are constant reminders of the problem, like the LHS track with its layer of vermiculite that's now suspected to be contaminated.

"I won't quit track over it," Wayland-Smith said.

**Sarah Barrick**

Sarah Barrick knew about lung disease in Libby at an early age.

"My dad was a minister. He did a lot of funerals," she recalled.

Barrick's father, now retired, still conducts funeral services from time to time for asbestosis victims. He even testified in one family's lawsuit against W.R. Grace.

See **Close to home** on Page 8

## Close to home

Continued from Page 6

Barrick, an English and journalism teacher at Libby High School, has urged her students to write about the effects of asbestos exposure on the community. It never became personal for her, though, until Kelly Cannon, a Libby man in his mid-30s who went to high school with her, was diagnosed with asbestosis. Another classmate from her neighborhood just found out she has the disease.

"We have a tendency to put it in the back of our mind until we have to deal with it," she said.

Barrick is still awaiting the results of her lung X-ray.

## To the Editor

Western News

Feb 23, 01

### \*Corruption costing city residents hundreds of thousands of dollars

To the Editor:

The longer I watch politicians, the more they amuse me. If the council thought I would back down because they enlisted the support of a bunch of respectable folks to support this fraud, they are mistaken. The fact that two council members and the mayor didn't sign on does give me hope that the gang is not totally unified. Four councilmen is still a majority though.

The letter signed by 13 dignitaries of Libby was well laid out and mostly factual. It was also 95 percent irrelevant, a diversionary tactic. I'm not concerned with image, just facts.

No one disputes that these folks worked hard to give the impression

that they were trying to find a site for the mayor's sheds that would benefit anyone but the mayor. That is all smoke and mirrors because in the end your \$400,000 gift ended up on the mayor's property, I suspect that was the plan all along. It was all for appearance when the council voted to secure this gift for the people of Libby. They didn't expect we'd try to hold them to their word.

I have tangible evidence laid out on the city ballpark property proving that those buildings could have fit there. I have disproved all the "multitude of problems with this site." This is the third time the council has trotted out this old song and dance; rewording the story does not change the facts. The challenge stands,

show me tangible credible proof of one condition that would have precluded accepting those buildings for the people of Libby. Until you actually produce facts on the ground, this still looks like you funneled public bounty into private pockets, again.

I believe exposing the corruption that I have seen cost this town hundreds of thousands of dollars in the last two years is a worthwhile volunteer venture. I believe that if we can put an end to the corruption, Libby will prosper.

I am taking up the mayor's challenge. I intend to ask for the mayor's resignation at the next council meeting, that is one positive thing I could do for this community. He has

jeopardized the rights of all asbestos victims in this town by accepting those buildings from W.R. Grace while controlling the \$8 million sent to help us. Many of the council's dealings in the future will revolve around Grace and the asbestos issue.

How can the council claim to work for the people when the mayor is paid so handsomely by Grace, with their blessing? I find it very unsettling that Paul Peronard supports this, what a cozy bunch. Is this how the EPA let us down in 1985?

Mine is the only signature on this letter because the truth will stand by itself, but a lie, even if it is supported by 150 pillars of this community, is still a lie.

D.C. Orr

# Grace adjusts medical plan

## Change opens health plan to people with unilateral pleural thickening of lung

W.R. Grace & Co. has changed its Libby medical plan to include people who have asbestos-related unilateral pleural thickening.

The change was made in conjunction with the enrollment of three patients diagnosed with the condition, which is a thickening of the membrane that surrounds one lung. The change concerns applications submitted Oct. 30, 2000, or later.

The medical plan previously restricted coverage to patients with thickening in both lungs.

"We have always said that this medical program is flexible and that we are willing to change it to accommodate additional medical conditions," said Alan Stringer, Grace's representative in Libby. "Dr. Brad Black showed us that there were people who had asbestos-related conditions but were not covered."

Pleural thickening is one of several conditions that qualify as asbestos-related disease for the medical expense program. The program covers 100 percent of eligible medical and prescription drug expenses and pre-approved home health or hospice care for current and former Libby residents who are enrolled.

The voluntary program requires a physician's diagnosis of an asbestos-related disease, without the requirement of a second opinion.

The program also covers the cost of prescribing smoking deterrents because smoking is known to aggravate asbestos-related diseases. Health Network America of New Jersey, a third-party administrator, oversees the program.

Because of perceived inadequacies of the Grace plan, a task force of Libby's Community Advisory Group has helped

See **Grace plan** on Page 4

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## Grace plan—

Continued from Page 1  
draw up what is intended to be an ideal plan for area residents suffering from asbestos-related diseases. The source of funding for the plan is not known, but the cost has been estimated at around \$500 million to treat 1,000 people over the next 40 years.

The plan was developed following complaints that a free medical plan offered by W.R. Grace was too restrictive in both eligibility requirements and coverage.

Changes to the Grace plan that were suggested by the CAG included easing residency requirements for eligibility, easing restrictions on the type of certification required for a physician to make a diagnosis qualifying a person for covered benefits, covering the cost of annual screenings and checkups for people who are eligible to apply for the plan but who have not been diagnosed with a covered condition, and expanding benefits for counseling, respite care, home health care and long-term care.

Stringer said 118 people have applied for coverage through the Grace medical plan and all of them have been accepted. "Nobody has been turned away," he said.



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I didn't participate in the medical screening, but I've changed my mind. Will there be another opportunity?

**A:** Guidance for future testing is being developed. The timing of additional testing and priorities for who may be tested have not yet been determined. However, you can still call 1-800-439-8308 to determine your eligibility for future testing. When dates and priorities are set, everyone eligible will be notified.

**For more information call:**

Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR at 406-441-1150, X257 or 406-293-2728 or  
Wendy Thomi, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241

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# Draft Resolution

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WHEREAS, the number of cases of asbestos related diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma in a community of the size of Lincoln County was sufficiently large to gain the attention of state and federal government agencies responsible for the protection of the environment and the assessment of and development of data bases about adverse impacts on public health from released hazardous substances; and

WHEREAS, in response to concerns over the causes of the significant number of cases of asbestos related diseases in Lincoln County, the United States Environmental Protection Agency ("USEPA") and the Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry ("ATSDR") of the U.S. Public Health Service, and their various environmental consultants have conducted investigations of certain sites and populations in and around Lincoln County where vermiculite was mined and processes; and

WHEREAS, in the performance of these investigations, the presence of tremolite asbestos has been detected at levels that the USEPA determined present a significant threat to the public health, welfare and the environment in and around the City of Libby in Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to mitigate the most prominent threats to public health, the USEPA has undertaken, and continues to pursue, the remediation and removal of tremolite asbestos contaminations from areas in and around certain historic, processing facilities within Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, the ATSDR has studied, and continues to study and assess, the nature and extent of the impacts of both occupational and non-occupational exposure to tremolite asbestos on public health in Lincoln County; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these investigations, the impacts of tremolite asbestos contamination on public health within the County include a mortality rate related to the presence of tremolite asbestos in the community in excess of 6000% of the levels that would be found in communities unaffected by the presence of tremolite asbestos; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these investigations and the discovery of the tremolite asbestos contamination and its toxicity, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has grown increasingly concerned about assuring the adequate protection of public health, safety, welfare, the environment and natural resources within the jurisdiction of Lincoln County from any adverse impacts that have been or may continue to be presented by, or arise out of exposure to, the tremolite asbestos contamination, and the preservation and restoration of the economic vitality of Lincoln County derived from its historic attractiveness as a recreational area and its previous reputation as a healthful residential, commercial and industrial area; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has further become increasingly aware of the inherent limitations on the scope of governmental response that USEPA and ATSDR can provide under current federal law; and

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 3 of the Montana Constitution expressly provides that all persons in Montana have an inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment, which right the Montana Supreme Court in *Montana Environmental Information Center v. Department of Environmental Quality*, 296 Montana 207, 988 P.2d 1236 (1999) has determined to be a fundamental constitutional right of all Montanans and a self executing provision of the Montana Constitution; and

WHEREAS, Article XI, Section 4 of the Montana Constitution vests county government with legislative, administrative and other powers provided or implied by law; and

WHEREAS, it is the inherent authority, fundamental responsibility, and necessary and proper affair of county government to secure, in compliance with such limitations and restrictions as may be prescribed by law, adequate protection of the public health, safety, welfare and the environment of its inhabitants, as well as to take such actions as are permitted by law to protect the fundamental, inalienable rights afforded by the Montana Constitution;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County does hereby establish a legislative proceeding before the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County to investigate the adequacy of existing environmental remedial programs and authorities and to take such action, including legislation at the county level and recommendations to the appropriate state or federal legislative body, as the Board of Commissioners, following consideration of the results of this investigation and input from the public, may deem appropriate;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in light of the extensive public health issues arising from the presence of tremolite asbestos contamination in and around certain parts of Lincoln County, and pursuant to the provisions of Article XI, Section 7(1) of the Montana Constitution, the Board of Commissioners hereby request that the Lincoln County Board of Health attend to and participate in, as appropriate, the investigation to be conducted by the Board of Commissioners pursuant to this Resolution No. ; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that it is necessary and appropriate to the affairs of the county that the scope of the investigation include but not be limited to the nature and source of any tremolite asbestos contamination in and around Lincoln County, potential sources of release of the tremolite asbestos contamination, potential methods to finance the abatement, if needed, of the contamination, the adequacy and sufficiency of enforcement programs and authorities at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of regulatory programs at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of liability programs and financial responsibility requirements at the county, state and federal levels, and the assessment of the adequacy, sufficiency, and limitations of financial resources of those parties who are or may be liable for abating the adverse impacts arising out of the tremolite asbestos contamination, including without limitation, liability insurance and other mechanisms in the private and commercial sector of the community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in order to assist the Board of Commissioners in the conduct of its investigation, the Public Health Unit of the County Attorney's office will provide all necessary and appropriate legal support services to the County Board of Commissioners.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in order to further the purposes of this investigation, the members of the County Board of Health may request that the County Board of Commissioners issue subpoenas requiring attendance of witnesses or production of books or other documents for evidence or testimony in any action or proceeding pending before the County Board of Commissioners.

Western News Feb 21, 01

WESTERN News Feb 21, 01

# Grace-EPA flap centers on penalty

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

Recent efforts to arrive at a mediated resolution to an access dispute between the Environmental Protection Agency and W.R. Grace fell apart solely because of the EPA's insistence on slapping Grace with a \$5 million fine, according to local company representative Alan Stringer.

Stringer disputed EPA on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard's statements that Grace was unwilling to perform cleanup work under an enforceable order.

"For him to say that we weren't going to

do that was an out and out fallacy," Stringer said.

The EPA sued Grace last fall after Grace locked the agency out of former company property owned by Kootenai Development Corporation, which came back under Grace's control after the company bought a majority share of KDC.

Attorneys for Grace and the EPA argued their points in federal court in Missoula during a December hearing. The judge presiding over the case ordered the two parties to try to work out their problems in mediation, which took place last month in Portland,

Ore.

EPA is seeking access to property Grace sold to KDC after Grace's vermiculite mine closed in 1990. KDC owns the mine site itself as well as property adjacent to and across the river from the former screening plant site at the mouth of Rainy Creek. After initially barring EPA from the property completely, Grace granted access to the KDC properties for investigative purposes only.

EPA also wants the riverfront properties cleaned up and to deposit asbestos-

See **Grace-EPA** on Page 4

## Grace-EPA

Continued from Page 1  
contaminated materials from the former screening plant at the mine site. The asbestos occurred as a contaminant in the vermiculite ore.

Grace has offered to remove and dispose of the soils and demolition debris stockpiled at the former screening plant and to replace the soil with gravel and topsoil from its own property. Grace has also offered to clean up the KDC properties next to and across the river from the screening site using the same contractor that cleaned up the former export plant in Libby last fall.

While Peronard said Grace refused to conduct the work under the scope of an enforceable order from the EPA, Stringer said the

company was willing to do that.

"When they said they had to have the penalties, it all stopped," Stringer said.

Grace asked the EPA to drop its claim for \$5 million in penalties, but the agency refused. Grace must be penalized because its actions have delayed the cleanup, put more people at risk and cost the government money, Peronard said.

"I think the EPA went over there with no intention of finding middle ground," Stringer said.

Grace also asked the EPA to free the company from any liability associated with chemicals, asphalt or other non-asbestos contamination that could be found in materials excavated from the screening plant site. The agency

can't legally do that, Peronard said. Stringer said the EPA had offered to waive liability early in negotiations but then pulled the offer.

The court in Missoula has been informed that mediation was unsuccessful, and the case will be scheduled for trial.

The EPA has stockpiled 50,000 cubic yards of excavated soil at the screening plant. The cost of transporting the contaminated soil out of the area for disposal has been estimated at \$4.5 million. Plans are under way to create a 4- to 6-acre site at the county landfill to safely dispose of asbestos-contaminated materials, Peronard said. The project is expected to cost about \$1.5 million, he said.

# ATSDR to share latest statistics from test results

An interim report of the results of the Libby medical testing program will be released on Thursday, Feb. 22, at the Citizen's Advisory Group in Libby.

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry representatives will be on hand at the meeting to discuss the report and to answer questions.

Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger of the ATSDR was scheduled to present an interim report to provide Libby residents with a summary of the medical testing results to date. The report includes data for tests results recently mailed to 1,078 people of the more than 6,000 participants in the testing program.

During the Jan. 25 CAG meeting, Lincoln County health officer Dr. Brad Black reported that the latest round of test results he had seen were showing 184 people with lung abnormalities.

Seventy percent of the 184 people were not occupationally linked to W.R. Grace's mine or vermiculite mill facilities in the Libby area, Black said. It was unknown at the meeting how many of the 184 people had an abnormality due to asbestos-tainted vermiculite

See **Test results** on Page 8

## Test results

Continued from Page 1  
exposure or another cause.

The free health screenings for qualified Libby area residents ended last fall but one of the three specialists, who examines the x-rays, went on sabbatical.

Local ATSDR representative Dan Strausbaugh said the problem was resolved last month but he wasn't sure when all the screening letters would be mailed.

As of Jan. 25, 1,830 letters had been mailed. ATSDR reported 6,200 participated in the free medical screenings.

Another 850 letters were scheduled to be mailed during the first week in February increasing the total to 2,680.

Lybarger will be reporting on the complete results of the x-rays, pulmonary function tests, and questionnaire results for only the first

1,200 files, not the entire results for all of those screened.

In early November, Lybarger presented "preliminary" statistics from a sampling of 429 screenings, which showed 9-10 percent of the people had lung abnormalities.

Local medical officials have predicted that 10 percent of the people screened will be found to have a lung malady related to vermiculite exposure.

Copies of the interim report will also be available for public review beginning Feb. 23, at the Libby Library, the ATSDR Office, 501 Mineral Ave., and at the Lincoln County Health Department in the county annex building at 418 Mineral Ave.

Libby or Elko, Nev., community members seeking information on the interim report, or who would like to receive a copy, should call the ATSDR Information Center toll free, at 1-888-42-ATSDR (1-888-422-8737). Callers should refer to the "Libby, Montana, site." ATSDR regional representative Dan Strausbaugh also may be called for information at (406) 441-1120 ext. 257 in Helena, or at 293-2728 in Libby.

# DEQ asked for safe air quality level for asbestos

A motion to reconsider the tabling action taken by the Judiciary Committee this past week resulted in an amendment being placed upon the death penalty bill which would give Montana voters an opportunity to determine whether or not the death penalty be applied for felons convicted of murder, or whether Montana should punish those offenders with life sentences in prison without parole.

Each year those opposing the death penalty have lobbied hard to get the law changed. The Human Rights Network and the American Civil Liberties Union, along with activists on the national level, have stepped up efforts to abolish the death penalty, but so far with no success.

Legislators believe the public should have a chance to decide an issue of such importance.

A measure tabled in the State/Federal Energy and Telecommunications Committee this week would have clarified the options states have when they believe regulations placed upon them by the federal government are unconstitutional. Another measure asking Congress to extricate the United States from the United Nations was heard and tabled. A bill to revoke the War Powers criteria, which would have placed unnecessary restrictions on citizens, was withdrawn before the scheduled hearing by its sponsor.

Still viable are resolutions which address federal policy on roadless areas, accumulated fuel build-ups on forests and urging support for energy generation using Montana's super-compliant coal.

On Thursday, Feb. 15, before a joint session of the house and senate, former state representative Linda McCulloch, as newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, presented the



## Legislative Update

By Aubyn Curtiss

annual state of Montana Education Address. Former seatmates and legislators sharing committee assignments gave Linda a warm welcome.

It was a special treat to have visitors from Lincoln County High School at the capitol to attend the joint session, MEA events, and monitor committee hearings and some floor debates.

Teachers David James and Michael Atherton, and students Raina Phillips, Nina Kwok and Lindsey Swallows not only participated in the above, but were also on hand to witness what happens at the Legislature when a major computer malfunction occurs. The computer, referred to as the "heart" of the bill-processing system, contains programs which are needed to write bills, prepare and add amendments to bills, track legislation and provide information to the public about hearings.

The days immediately prior to transmittal are particularly critical because all but certain types of bills by the 45th day must be acted upon by committees, passed on second and third reading, and transmitted to the senate or house. Many

legislators were taken unaware when notice of committee hearings on their bills were not delivered. Someone had to find them and say: "Hey, your bill is up next," without giving them time to prepare testimony or notify witnesses they'd planned to lend them support. There is a 72-hour notice requirement when bills are scheduled to be heard in committee which is to enable bill sponsors opportunity to notify out of town witnesses in time to travel to Helena.

Committees meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays met a special crunch, as Thursday was the last day for taking executive action before transmittal deadline. Beginning Feb. 19, only special committee meetings will be held, and all-day floor sessions are expected to consume all available time for the remainder of the week when both House and Senate are to have completed their work for the first half of this session. Members are eagerly anticipating spending a few days at home with families and constituents, and catching up on their mail.

Heard in Judiciary Committee this past week was another measure which would ask the Department of Environmental Quality to develop a task force to compile information gathered at Libby in order to determine a safe air quality standard for asbestos materials.

Although persons in Lincoln County have already been harmed, it is hoped that determining safe exposure standards may spare other communities the harm and distress experienced in northwest Montana.

Concerns expressed by legislators were that perhaps this is a duplication of efforts already undertaken by the EPA. The proposal was passed out of committee.

# Asbestos issue creating stress on youngsters

By LYNNETTE HINTZE

Special to the News

Libby High School sophomore Necia Wayland-Smith and her friends were approached at the recent Class A divisional basketball tournament by adults from another city who asked an unsettling question: "Are you guys all dying up there in Libby?"

Lorenn Moore, a Libby freshman, got the same type of inquisition from other students at the state speech and drama meet. "Is Libby really covered by clouds of asbestos dust?" they asked.

"They think it's really bad here," Moore said. "When they found out I was from Libby, they had a lot of questions."

Some out-of-towners have asked students if they personally know W.R. Grace, the namesake of the giant corporation that's being blamed for the widespread asbestos disease and death linked to Grace's former vermiculite mine in Libby.

Everywhere they go, the questions follow, or the jokes.

"Don't cough on me," an out-of-town student told another Libby student, apparently in jest.

But it hurts deep down.

Libby students have traditionally taken pride in their school and community. Set against the backdrop of the Cabinet Mountains in one of Montana's most scenic locations, Libby is off the beaten track. Its remoteness has in a way, though,

solidified the sense of community there through the years.

The latest news — that 30 percent of those in the first round of testing have lung abnormalities most likely linked to asbestos exposure—has shaken the community and its children. A once-secure haven is now being poked and prodded by government health agencies. Lists of sick people are being drawn up.

Nothing seemingly will ever be the same again.

"I hate when people say they're afraid to drive through Libby," said Heidi Desch, editor-in-chief of the Tamarack, Libby High School's newspaper.

Desch and her staff have taken a leadership role in keeping students up-to-date about the asbestos situation in Libby, even though she doesn't always agree it's front-page news.

There's a sense of defiance among some students.

"I'm tired of hearing about it. I don't understand what they (the victims) are going through," Desch said. "A part of me wishes it was over."

Krista Roll, a senior, said she wouldn't let the asbestos problem affect her decision to one day come back to Libby to live if that's what she wants to do.

"And I'm not going to pack up and move away (now) because of it," she said.

Roll doesn't like the "skewed" view of Libby some national publications have presented.

"There are more people here than the few who are dying," she said.

Children in Libby are under tremendous stress, said Kim Lee of Libby, a former school counselor who has experience in working with children who have experienced grief and loss.

"This asbestos issue is so slow moving and insidious, it impacts the lives of entire families," Lee said. "There's unrelenting rage, helplessness and hopelessness. It's got to affect the children."

Children sense their parents' fear and anger; they overhear conversations and they feel powerless to help, she said.

Sometimes they're confused by the details. Lee's 7-year-old son, for example, "was afraid of laundry for awhile," because he had heard that many wives of miners were exposed to toxic asbestos dust when they washed their husbands' work clothes.

Lee realized how invasive the asbestos issue has become when she observed that two children in her 11-year-old daughter's class have grandparents who have died from asbestos disease.

There are many multi-generational families in Libby, which means several generations are dealing with the emotional issue at the same time. That's the case for Katie

Castleton, a second-grader at Asa Wood Elementary School who has been directly impacted by asbestos. Her grandparents, Mel and Lerah Parker, had to close their business, Raintree Nursery, after federal officials declared it a Superfund site because asbestos-laden vermiculite was screened there for decades.

Castleton spent a great deal of time at her grandparents' nursery; she even had her own bedroom at their home on the nursery property. Most of the Parkers' household items, including their granddaughter's toys and her baby cradle, had to be destroyed because of asbestos contamination.

"It makes me sad and really, really mad about what W.R. Grace did," Castleton said. "They're real big jerks because they let Grandma and Grandpa have that property when they knew it was exposed. They shouldn't have kept it a secret."

Her parents and grandparents have explained the situation to her, and have worked through her earlier fears. When the 8-year-old first realized what was happening, her first question was: "Am I going to die?"

Lee recommends that parents talk to their children, but it's difficult for many.

"They're not to the stage where they can deal with it yet," she said.

See **Youngsters** on Page 8

## Youngsters

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Continued from Page 6

Libby students agreed it's hard to confide in their parents about asbestos disease.

"It's weird to talk about it," said Mari Dofelmire, a freshman. "I do wonder about it."

Dofelmire's father received a letter from federal health officials saying he has scarring on his lungs.

"I don't think he has it. That's what I keep telling myself," she said.

LHS senior Jason Worley said he and fellow classmates in the journalism class talk about asbestos more than most students because they've written about the issue.

"No one really wants to think about it, but it has become a community problem," he said.

Added Moore: "It's a touchy subject. It's hard to imagine some of your loved ones dying."

About 435 Libby children ages 10 to 18 went through the free health screening to determine potential risk for asbestos disease and paths of exposure, according to the Tamarack, Libby's school newspaper. They didn't get lung X-

rays, but did complete pulmonary function tests.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, which conducted the tests, doesn't have numbers yet on how many children have signs of asbestos disease.

Lee believes Libby residents will ultimately find strength in one of the community's biggest assets — its families..

"The families who are dealing with this, they're the ones who will have to help the children deal with it," she said. "It's not necessarily best to bring in battalions of counselors."

More support groups are forming to help families and kids cope.

"Kids can feel abandoned if the parents are too preoccupied or obsessed with this," she added.

Nancy Chalgren, a Libby High School guidance counselor, said the school plans to use grant money to set up after-school support groups to deal with many issues, including the asbestos impact.

Although students are more apt to be affected by the asbestos dis-

ease of a grandparent rather than parent, there's still a lot of fear that accompanies the situation, Chalgren said.

"With asbestos, it lasts for so long, there's the feeling there's no end in sight," she said. "It's definitely a stress for students."

*Lynnette Hintze is a reporter with the Kalispell Daily Inter Lake.*



Libby, Montana

Western News

Feb 16, 01

# EPA, Grace heading to court

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

A long-running access dispute between the Environmental Protection Agency and W.R. Grace is headed back to court following a failed attempt at mediation.

"It fell apart pretty quickly on practically every substantive issue," said EPA on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard.

The EPA sued Grace last fall after Grace locked the federal agency out of its mine reclamation area.

After attorneys for Grace and the EPA argued their points in court during a two-hour hearing on Dec. 20, a federal judge in Missoula ordered the two parties to try to work out their problems in mediation.

The EPA has had little luck at negotiating with Grace, Peronard said.

"It's always a matter of whenever Grace proposes anything you never seem to get very

**"The fact is that they've interfered with the cleanup operation, and we've got to get a pound of flesh for that."**

Paul Peronard  
EPA coordinator

far in negotiating the details," he said.

EPA is seeking access to property Grace sold to KDC after Grace's vermiculite mine closed in 1990. KDC owns the mine site itself as well as property adjacent to and across the river from the former screening plant site at the mouth of Rainy Creek. After initially barring EPA from the property completely,

Grace granted access to the KDC properties for investigative purposes only.

EPA also seeks to conduct cleanup operations on the riverfront properties and to use the mine site to dispose of asbestos-contaminated materials excavated from the former screening plant location. The asbestos occurred as a contaminant in the vermiculite ore.

Grace has offered to remove and dispose of the soils and demolition debris stockpiled at the former screening plant and to replace the soil with gravel and topsoil from its own property. Grace has also offered to clean up the KDC properties next to and across the river from the screening site using the same contractor that cleaned up the former export plant in Libby last fall.

The problem with Grace's offer is that the

See EPA and Grace on Page 1

## EPA and Grace

Continued from Page 1  
company has refused to do the work under the scope of an EPA order such as the order developed for the export plant cleanup, Peronard said.

"It would be great for them to do the cleanup," he said. "They have to do it right. They have to do it under an enforceable order."

Without an order to direct the work, the EPA would have no way to ensure the cleanup is conducted properly, Peronard said.

Grace has also asked the EPA to free the company from any liability associated with chemicals, asphalt or other non-asbestos contamination that could be found in materi-

als excavated from the screening plant site. The agency can't legally do that, Peronard said.

"It's a non-starter, as they say," he said.

Grace also asked the EPA to drop its claim for \$5 million in penalties. The agency is adamant that penalties must be collected.

Grace's actions have delayed the cleanup, put more people at risk and cost the government money, Peronard said.

"The fact is that they've interfered with the cleanup operation, and we've got to get a pound of flesh for that," he said.

The EPA has informed the judge in Missoula that mediation efforts

were unsuccessful and that the case will have to be resolved in court. How long that may take is uncertain.

"It's on the court's timeframe," Peronard said.

With work on hold for the winter, EPA has stockpiled 50,000 cubic yards of excavated soil at the screening plant. The cost of transporting the contaminated soil out of the area for disposal has been estimated at \$4.5 million. Plans are under way to create a 4- to 6-acre site at the county landfill to safely dispose of asbestos-contaminated materials, Peronard said. The project is expected to cost about \$1.5 million, he said.

## To the Editor

Western News

Feb 16, 01

### Relocation of Millwork West to mayor's property detailed by officials

To the Editor:

This narrative details the sequence of events which led up to the relocation of Millwork West to the property owned by Universal Land.

When Paul Peronard of the EPA informed Mel Burnett and the City of Libby that Millwork West would have to be relocated, Mel indicated that he was interested in being in the old Frontier Glass location on California Avenue. The city called the owners of this property to see if it could be rented or leased. We were told they would not lease the building. Alan Stringer and Paul Peronard each called them to see about leasing, they also told them no. The thought had been to put the retail business in the Frontier Glass Building and W.R. Grace would provide a storage building on the old baseball fields.

Jim Stout told the city they were looking at a sprung structure which the city would be able to keep after the clean-up was complete.

The city and W.R. Grace next looked at putting the sprung structure and the whole business on the baseball fields at the city industrial park (which the EPA had determined was clean). The EPA determined that this

setup would not work because there would be some risk to customers and truck traffic. Although some on the council didn't want the sprung structure, most did.

Next the city looked at putting the sprung structure on the big grassy area in front of city hall. Mark Fennesy, city attorney, informed the council that the property had restrictions placed on it at the time Stimson donated the property to the city. The restriction would not allow for a retail business to be located on the property. The mayor then offered to trade property with the city so that the sprung structure could still be located on city property. The city attorney said that the traded land would then become restricted in the same manner as the city property.

At this point, W.R. Grace and Millwork West had decided to put up two metal buildings instead of the sprung structure. The city considered putting the buildings down by the Legion baseball fields, but the city ran into a multitude of problems with this site. First, the City met resistance from the neighbors. According to city attorney Mark Fennesy there were land restrictions on part of the prop-

erty. There were waterline concerns, parking concerns for the Legion baseball field, also, the size of the first building would have to be smaller than originally conceived because of the size of the power company easement; the size of the second building would also have to be down-sized to allow for fire department access behind the building, and finally, it was determined the largest building would be placed over a large sewer line. It did not seem feasible to meet all of Millwork West's needs and still meet property restraints.

The next scenario was to trade property adjacent to Asa Wood with the property next to Town Pump. It was thought that Town Pump could buy the property and trade with W.R. Grace. Grace staff did not feel there was sufficient time to pursue this complicated course of action.

Because the mayor thought it would be preferable if a public entity could benefit from having the buildings built on public property he asked Kirby Maki if the school district had property that would work for this purpose. Mr. Maki could not think of any. Rita Windom was then

asked if the county had property that would work for this purpose. Rita suggested the county park across the river. Mel Burnett didn't feel it would work very well for them, and Mrs. Windom couldn't think of anything else that might work.

The city, at this point, could not come up with anything and informed W.R. Grace and Millwork West that they would have to pursue private property on which to relocate the business. W.R. Grace and Millwork West then looked at other properties including property on the other side of the river owned by Mark Owen near the county shop and the old Libby Ready Mix location to name a few.

**Thomas Wood, Libby Fire Chief**  
**Bill Watt, Libby Fire Marshal**  
**Paul Peronard, EPA**  
**Alan Stringer, W.R. Grace**  
**Dan Stephens, Libby City Council**  
**Mel Burnett, Millwork West, Inc.**  
**George Bauer, Libby City Council**  
**Judy Porter, Libby City Council**  
**Jane Thom, Libby City Council**  
**Kirby Maki, School Superintendent**  
**Rita Windom, County Commissioner**  
**John Norberg, City Building Inspector**  
**Dan Thede, City of Libby**



## Libby's asbestos victims to help researchers learn about disease

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

Local asbestos victims may have a lot to teach the medical community about the health effects of tremolite asbestos, the head of the University of Montana's recently created Center for Environmental Health Science told the Libby Community Advisory Group Thursday.

The center's three major focus areas are respiratory and autoimmune diseases, neurological diseases and genetic and molecular diseases, Dr. Andrij Holian told the CAG. The study of the asbestos situation in Libby is written into the center's mission statement.

Holian has been researching lung diseases for about 20 years, especially diseases related to exposure to silicates and asbestos.

"Having a community like this for study is the best tool for investigators," he said.

A team of about a half-dozen specialists will be studying different areas of the asbestos issue, Holian said. Studies that are underway or planned include the expo-

sure of mice to different forms of asbestos and the study of Libby-area residents who have been exposed. Goals include devising a blood test that would show if a person has been exposed, determining why some people are susceptible to asbestos-related diseases and others are not, and eventually developing cures.

The forms of asbestos found in vermiculite ore mined near Libby are chemically different - and more potent - than the type of asbestos that was commonly used to make fireproof materials and which is more familiar to toxicologists. Why the asbestos found near Libby is more deadly isn't known.

"There haven't been enough cases of it to come up with this observation until now," Holian said.

Holian hopes area residents diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases will volunteer to provide biological samples for research. Blood samples are needed, as are samples from the lungs of affected people.

In a 15- to 30-minute procedure, a small amount of a sterile

saline solution would be put into, then taken out of, the lung of a patient under general anesthesia. Researchers would use the material collected to look for biomarkers to indicate exposure to asbestos and for genetic clues that could help solve the mystery of why some people are more prone than others to be affected by asbestos.

"What we'd prefer to have are individuals who are recently diagnosed, early in the disease," Holian said.

While some people who are further along are also needed, starting with people in the early stages would provide an opportunity for study over a number of years as the disease progresses, Holian said.

"I look at this as a great opportunity for partnering with this community," he said.

Holian sees Libby as a long-term project that could provide a wealth of information for researchers, but short-term benefits may be few and far between.

"I'll be honest, we're not going to generate answers very quickly," he said.

# Asbestos may be released by house fires

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

Structure fires could release deadly asbestos from insulation or pipes into the air, but a hot enough temperature will turn it to harmless sand, according to government officials.

It's the friable asbestos - "anything you can crush with your hand" - that's more likely to become airborne than non-friable, said John Podolinsky, asbestos-control program coordinator for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Friable asbestos is the kind that was typically used in the manufacture of pipes and boilers, attic insulation, ceiling textures and wall-boards, Podolinsky said. The asbestos content must also be more than 1 percent to classify it as friable.

Asbestos is a major concern in Libby, where it was once mined as a by-product of vermiculite. The vermiculite was used in insulation in homes in Libby and elsewhere.

Inhaling the invisible fibers of asbestos has been found to cause fatal diseases.

The 1-percent rule "was never meant to be a health standard," said Podolinsky. "It was just a line in the sand that they drew because

most of the manufacturers wanted to take advantage of the benefits of asbestos, and they put in more than 1 percent."

For example, pipes and boilers typically contain 10-75 percent asbestos, he said. In cases like that, manufacturers would add the mineral largely because it's fire resistant at very high temperatures.

In the case of Libby vermiculite, the asbestos was natural, Podolinsky said. It was mined along with the vermiculite.

The mining companies tried to remove the mineral at the mill, he said. But "in some cases, the milling process didn't get rid of it all."

Examples of non-friable asbestos are floor coverings and roofing materials, Podolinsky said.

Regardless of where the asbestos came from, a house fire can free it from whatever it's embedded in, said Podolinsky. Firefighters, of course, wear protective gear but onlookers should try to avoid high concentrations of smoke.

"If there's a plume, they're in danger of being exposed to asbestos," he said, of burning buildings containing asbestos materials.

However, he said a brief exposure doesn't necessarily mean the person will become sick.

If a fire reaches about 2,500 degrees F, the asbestos "just melts and becomes a grain of sand," said Bob Vick, regional asbestos coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "So it no longer has the sharp points on it" that can adhere to the lungs and interfere with breathing.

That hot a fire isn't one where anybody would enter the building anyway, said Bill Watt, fire marshal for the Libby Volunteer Fire Department.

"I imagine it could get up that high," Watt said. "Normally that would be if it was totally burning. I mean totally involved. No firefighters are going to be in it at that temperature."

The maximum temperature for firefighters with their heavy clothes and helmets, hoods, gloves and face shields is around 500 degrees when it's about 1,000 at ceiling level, Watt said.

There's no special training for Libby firefighters in handling asbestos-containing materials, said fire chief Tom Wood. But along with their standard equipment the department has eight special respirators donated by the EPA, he said.

"When the building is involved in a fire and we go into it, we're protected," Wood said.

## CAG to seek independent technical assistance

Libby's Community Advisory Group on asbestos issues is looking for help from a program based at Kansas State University that provides technical assistance for communities dealing with toxic contamination.

A committee of the CAG is working on a proposal to seek assistance from the Technical Outreach Services for Communities program at Kansas State. The committee plans to:

- Conduct a needs assessment of CAG members to identify concerns and areas needing further research;
- Determine a baseline understanding of asbestos-related diseases and the roles and scopes of work of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry;
- Research advantages and dis-

advantages of Superfund designation and make a recommendation to the CAG;

- Determine the role of TOSC that would be most beneficial;
- Prepare an action plan for utilizing TOSC resources.

The TOSC program is a service of the Hazardous Substances Re-

search Centers program. About 30 universities across the country form a network of five HSRCs, and each HSRC serves two EPA regions.

The TOSC program is aimed at helping communities with hazardous substance pollution problems by providing independent technical information and assistance.

## ATSDR releases health document on tremolite

A public health document titled "Tremolite-related Asbestos," is now available in draft form from the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, with public comment due by mid-March.

The document is in response to the presence of tremolite asbestos in vermiculite ore mined near Libby. Tremolite, if inhaled, is one of the most dangerous forms of asbestos.

The contaminated vermiculite from Libby was mined, distributed and processed into many products used across the country. Workers, household contacts and the general public who come in contact with contaminated products "may be at risk of exposure and potential health effects," says the document.

In the document, the federal agency reviews the scientific literature describing the relationship between exposure to tremolite-related asbestos and the resulting health effects.

All public comments will be made available for public inspection, so no confidential business information should be submitted.

Copies of the draft are available at the ATSDR office in Libby, 501 Mineral Ave, Telephone is 293-2728. The agency reserves the right to provide only one copy of

the draft free of charge.

Comments on the draft must be received by March 23.

Written comments should be sent to ATSDR Information Center, Division of Toxicology, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Mailstop E-57, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333.

The comments should bear the docket control number ATSDR-165.

Copies of the draft are available at the agency's temporary office in Libby, 501 Mineral Ave. Telephone is 293-2728. The agency reserves the right to provide only one copy of the draft free of charge.

### Asbestos groups meet Feb. 15 & 19

The evening support group for individuals impacted by asbestos related disease will meet at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb 15, at 415 Louisiana Ave.

The day group will meet at 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 19, at the same location.

The groups will meet regularly on the first and third Thursday and Monday of each month.

For more information, call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

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## **W.R. Grace and Kootenai Development Company Make Offer to Clean-Up Nursery, Other Properties**

In court-ordered mediation with the Environmental Protection Agency, W.R. Grace & Co. and Kootenai Development Company (KDC) offered a plan that would allow the stalled Nursery property clean up to move forward and also result in the remediation of two KDC-owned parcels with Grace paying the costs.

Though Grace and KDC negotiated in good faith and made substantial concessions at last month's mediation, the EPA was unwilling to compromise. This was unfortunate. Unless this dispute can be resolved out of court, it appears that a Missoula judge will have the final say on who pays for this important local project.

Grace and KDC believe that a speedy conclusion to this dispute is in everybody's best interest. The offer Grace and KDC made to the EPA during last month's mediation is outlined below.

Specifically, Grace offers to remove and dispose of the soils and demolition debris stockpiled at the Nursery property. In addition, KDC has offered, at no charge, enough gravel and topsoil from its property to restore the Nursery land to its original condition.

Grace also offers to clean two other KDC properties, one adjacent to the Nursery property and the other across the Kootenai River, using the same techniques and contractor used to clean the Export Plant last Fall. That project was completed to the EPA's satisfaction quickly and with little controversy.

In return, EPA should free Grace and KDC from any liability related to any horticultural chemicals, asphalt or other contamination - except asbestos - that may be found in the soil and debris taken from the Nursery property.

The EPA should also drop its lawsuit seeking access to KDC's property and the related claims for penalties.

Grace and KDC strongly urge the government to seriously consider this offer. Not only does it result in a resolution of the issues, at no cost to the taxpayer, it will also save as much as \$2 million in federal funds the EPA says is needed to build an asbestos disposal site in Lincoln County.

Alan Stringer  
President KDC

## Monumental blunder by city enriches mayor, not people of Libby

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following letter was submitted to the Libby City Council on Monday, Feb. 5. To the Editor:*

October 5, 1998 was the first city council meeting I ever attended. That was when the council voted to put Lolo waterline out for bid. It never happened. I couldn't believe that the council could promise to do something in a public meeting and then reverse their decision in private. I commented then, that once the council takes a legal action by voting to do something, you have essentially promised to do that. You could not defend your actions then, you told me to take you to court. That's not my style. I chose to make it public instead, you have to answer to the voters.

Nearly two and a half years later we are still in the same place. On July 6, 2000 the council voted to accept a \$400,000 gift from W.R. Grace in the form of temporary housing for Millwork West. Once Industrial Park was proclaimed clean, those buildings would become permanent public assets. At some later, secret meeting, this gift was redirected to property the mayor has interest in.

A newspaper article and my own questions about this, have yielded three reasons for this action. This is the only public record of why you made this decision. All three reasons have proved baseless. I'm here tonight to inform you these stories proved to be untrue, and to give the council another chance to explain the confidential discussions that led to a \$400,000 windfall for the city ending up in private pockets in direct contradiction to the council's official promise.

One reason given, and the easiest to dismiss was the mayor's quote in the newspaper, "We had an outcry

from quite a few neighbors." I got this same story at the council meeting two months ago. On the face of it, this statement seems true. I have determined that there was an outcry from quite a few neighbors. These are all good people with valid concerns about a change in their neighborhood. We have to respect their wishes, but we have to weigh their convenience against the \$400,000 benefit to the city, and the right of the city council to utilize our property in our best interests.

The council proved they understood this concept when they fought tooth and nail to allow an asphalt plant on the mayor's property. The plant was permitted by the State, and the mayor has a right to utilize his property in his best interests. I personally thought it was a poor place for it, but we have land-use regulations for exactly this type of situation.

The council took an unpopular position in this case, yet they protected the property rights of the mayor. They did not take the same position when the people of Libby would have benefited from those buildings and I am troubled that they chose to do so in a clandestine manner.

Story number one proves to be a swing and a miss!

Another reason given was a power

line right-of-way through the smaller building. There is again some superficial truth to this statement.

The problem is the same as the first example. Did the inconvenience of this powerline outweigh the benefits of a \$400,000 gift? My experience leads me to believe that the powerline could have stayed where it is with the building on top of it. If it was deemed necessary to move it, the cost would be less than \$1,000 – a 400 to 1 return of investment.

Strike two!

The next reason given was a sewer line directly below the building. This would be a problem. At the meeting two months ago, the council told me fire chief Tom Wood would not let them put the buildings over the sewer line, and given the information as it was presented to him the chief was right to take that position.

The problem arises only because I am skeptical of the veracity of this council due to our previous dealings. So I took the time to verify this statement. I went over to the mayor's property, measured those buildings and then staked them out on the city property – this is what I do for a living.

I then marked out the sewer line by lining up manholes and verified this position with maps provided by

the city. My observations, and yours if you take the time to drive by the ballpark, lead me to believe those buildings could have fit on the city property with no involvement of the sewer line and room to spare.

There are eight traffic cones out there delineating the four corners of two buildings. The barrier tape running across the back of those lines is my representation of the sewer line.

Strike three. You're outta there!

All three reasons have proved to be suspect. I challenge this council to prove me wrong. I'll give you the benefit of doubt as I wasn't privy to the secret negotiations that placed those buildings where they are. There may yet be a logical reason and I'll give you a full month to dream one up.

I won't speculate as to the motives at work here. But, in my opinion this looked like a monumental blunder that enriched the mayor. Bottom line is, you promised to secure this gift for the people of Libby, now explain why you didn't.

Please put me on next month's agenda so we can discuss this further, and hopefully you can prove that you acted with the taxpayers in mind in this instance. So far the line between fantasy and fact is quite blurred.

D.C. Orr

# Schools ask for testing two tracks

High school track sits on  
layer of vermiculite tailings

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

The Libby School District is looking for help from the Environmental Protection Agency to clean up asbestos-contaminated mill tailings sealed beneath the high school and middle school tracks.

The district used tailings from W.R. Grace's vermiculite mine and mill complex from the early 1970s until 1983. The LHS track was encapsulated with asphalt after Grace warned the district that asbestos fibers in the tailings could pose problems.

In a letter sent last week to EPA officials, school superintendent Kirby Maki said the district is "extremely concerned" about the tailings. Maki asked the EPA to conduct tests at the tracks, remove the tailings and replace them with fill material, and reinstall the track surfaces.

"I don't know what's going to happen, but at least they're going to look at that," Maki said. "They are going to do some testing, and if there are materials posing a health threat they'll have to get them removed."

Because the tailings are encapsulated in asphalt, Maki said he doesn't think they pose a present danger. But the tracks are in need of repair and replacement, he said.

"Just having it there on school property is a liability I don't think we should have at this point in time," he said.

The EPA needs to determine the extent of the contamination, Maki said. In addition to use on the track itself, piles of tailings were stored around the area for application to the track when needed, he said.

"Hopefully they'll do some testing and if we have any problems, they'll take care of it for us or hold W.R. Grace responsible for it," he said.

Grace tested the track in 1981 and found what a company memo called "surprisingly high" fiber concentrations stirred up by runners. On a hot, dry, windless July day, fiber concentrations were measured at .14 fibers per cubic centimeter of air for the lead runner and .22 fibers per cc for a following runner.

At the time of testing, the track was compacted due to recent rains and lack of use. No dust was visible.

According to the memo, short-term concentrations as high as 1.0 fibers per cc may have been possible when the track was in well-used condition and in use by a number of people.

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**ASK EPA!!**

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: I've heard that EPA is cleaning up homes in Minnesota. Why are Libby homes not getting cleaned up?**

**A:** EPA is doing some clean-up work in yards on Minnesota homes that have been contaminated with a rock waste product called "stoner rock" from a vermiculite expansion operation in Minneapolis. This rock may contain up to 70% asbestos. It looks like indistinct grey rocks that can be up to several inches in diameter. Some of this material has been found in the western part of the Export Plant, but has not been seen in other areas around Libby.

"Stoner rock" is different from the vermiculite concentrate that went to the Screening Plant and to the Export Plant to be either bagged or expanded. The vermiculite concentrate is dark grey to black, and has the form of small "flakes." EPA has found concentrations of 1 to 12% asbestos in this vermiculite.

Please call the EPA Information Center in Libby at 293-6194 to report any unpopped vermiculite on your property or inn or around Libby. EPA may eventually remove the material but, in the meantime, we advise that you don't disturb it.

No work is being done to remove vermiculite insulation or other potential asbestos sources from inside homes in Minnesota or Montana.

To report vermiculite insulation in your home, please call the Lincoln County Environmental Health Dept. at 293-7781, X228

For more information Call:

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241 or  
Ron Anderson, Director Lincoln County Environmental Health at 293-7781, X228.

# W.R. Grace will honor commitments

## Company says health plan, hospital funds to continue

W.R. Grace will continue to honor its commitments to the Libby community if the company decides to file for Chapter 11 reorganization, its local spokesman said late last week.

"Chapter 11 means reorganization, not liquidation. It buys us breathing room," said Alan Stringer, Grace's representative in Libby. "We are totally committed to carrying forward our Libby medical obligations."

Grace provided St. John's Lutheran Hospital with a \$250,000 payment in 2000 and committed to paying the same amount every year it is needed to provide medical services for asbestos-related victims. Grace officials promised further funding as needs become more clearly identified.

The company is also providing free medical insurance coverage for area residents diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. More than 90 people had been accepted into the program as of mid-January with nobody turned away.

Stringer stressed that the company has not yet filed for Chapter 11 reorganization and that's it's only an option at this point.

In the company's financial report for the final quarter of 2000, Grace CEO Paul Norris said reorganization under Chapter 11 was one option to consider.

The chemical giant is facing increasing liabilities from pending personal-injury lawsuits, class action suits and property damage suits.

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## Where's Waldo Montana?

Missing: The State of Montana

Lost: Years ago

Result: Hundreds, check that, thousands of asbestos-related disease victims.

And Montana is still missing-in-action a year after federal and state officials rushed to Libby following newspaper reports of a health and environmental disaster.

The federal agencies are here and involved. The state, well, the bigwigs show up for the photo ops and key meetings.

On Wednesday, the Legislature joined the ranks of absent-without-leave by refusing to fund a part-time state health worker at \$18,500 a year. The worker was to assist families in finding aid.

Legislators tabled Rep. Eileen Carney's bill saying they couldn't find \$18,500 in a \$2.3 billion budget.

Presently, W.R. Grace is providing health insurance coverage for some people. We're told not everyone qualifies but Grace hasn't turned anyone away yet.

The other option is to sue Grace but you better get ready to stand in a long, slow-moving line. The courts have been hearing 3-4 cases a year.

And worse yet, Grace is now admitting that bankruptcy is a consideration versus litigating a mounting number of asbestos-related lawsuits.

If Grace goes belly-up, the pressure will be on St. John's Lutheran Hospital to provide services to what could be as many as 1,000 people with asbestos-related health problems. Our local hospital doesn't have the resources, either.

Perhaps then the state will be forced to make more than a verbal commitment to Libby after it failed to recognize an asbestos problem years ago and then didn't warn employees. And now has done little or nothing to help us get through a tough medical crisis.

Why is it we send taxes to Helena? - Roger Morris

# Bankruptcy an option says Grace

■ Nearly 50,000 cases filed  
during 2000 against company

Chapter 11 bankruptcy as a consideration versus continued litigation was mentioned Monday by W.R. Grace CEO Paul Norris in the company's final quarterly report for the year 2000.

"Asbestos litigation continues to be our company's biggest challenge," he said. "During 2000 we have seen the litigation environment worsen and become more uncertain."

Nearly 50,000 bodily injury claims were received during 2000, an 81-percent increase over 1999, according to the company's financial report.

As of Dec. 31, 2000, Grace has pending 7 property damage suits, 9 attic insulation class action lawsuits and 124,907 bodily injury claims.

Eighty-four claims by Libby area residents are pending in district court against the owners of a former vermiculite mine near Libby. The vermiculite was contaminated with tremolite asbestos.

"Recent adverse events in asbestos bodily litigation, including petitions for bankruptcy reorganization by several co-defendant companies have caused an environment that increases the risk of more claims being filed than previously projected, with higher settlement demands," the company's financial report said.

In October, Owens Corning voluntarily filed a reorganization petition under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. Since then, other companies facing asbestos litigation have filed for bankruptcy.

Grace has effectively managed asbestos-related litigation for over 20 years, despite the bankruptcy of a number of other co-defendants.

Last year, a Grace official had reported the company had paid out \$15.6 million in awards from 64 cases related to its Libby operations.

In its latest financial report, Grace reported its asbestos-related liability at \$1.1 billion.

In Libby, Grace committed to providing St. John's Lutheran Hospital with \$250,000 a year to help provide medical services for asbestos-related victims. Grace officials promised further funding as needs become more clearly identified.

Also the company is providing free medical insurance coverage for area residents diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. More than 90 people had been accepted into the program as of mid-January with nobody turned away.

However, Grace's local spokesman, Alan Stringer, has said that if there is no company, there is no health plan.

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## Asphalt plant not relevant to asbestos issues

To the Editor:

Concerning Ann Martin's condescendingly terse letter concerning my condescension, that she perceived or projected last week: First, do not in any way confuse my support for the temporary, portable asphalt plant with the asbestos issue. As an independent supplier I spent

a lot of time up on the hill dumping diesel and #5 burner fuel, from 1976 to 1990.

Employees affected deserve compensation. And in no way are these issues even remotely connected, except in the "stop the world and pray for food and help" mindset group.

And secondly, how do com-

munities like Kalispell, Whitefish, Bonners Ferry, Sandpoint, etc., get away with not only having an asphalt plant, but passing ordinances that demand paved parking lots and paved driveways on new housing units? Relax, and enjoy the show.

Rob Uithof

## Uithof to critic: do the science or knock it off

To the Editor:

Concerning the sentence in Julie Waters-Barcomb's letter to the editor: "as a derogatory term for those who oppose the asphalt plant's toxic emissions." Aged people tend to be stuck on "How it was," and refuse to hear anything that might change that reality (memory).

At 30, you should be able to

hear at least a little bit of quality information that is not exactly within your present ideological bell jar. But, rigid thinking affects people in mysterious ways.

Please list the "toxic emissions" by name and quantity. Do the science or knock it off.

Rob Uithof

P.S. You mention asbestos in your letter. Why? And did you

know the largest producer of dry wall in the United States declared bankruptcy last week due to asbestos litigation? What makes dry wall in your house and office fire resistant? Asbestos.

Any chance that W.R. Grace is not totally responsible for every case of asbestosis in Libby?

What are the walls in your office?

## **New asbestos group meets Monday, Feb. 5**

The new support group for people impacted by asbestos related disease will meet at 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5, at 415 Louisiana Ave.

The mission of the group is to provide information and to help people identify the impacts of asbestos-related stress on their lives. Anyone who has been diagnosed or has a loved one diagnosed is welcome. There is no charge to participants.

For more information, call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

Eastern News Feb 2, 09

## Court gives EPA access to mine

By ROGER MORRIS  
Western News Publisher

The U.S. District Court in Missoula ruled Friday in favor of the EPA giving the federal agency full access to the former V.R. Grace mine site and two other properties near Libby.

The EPA and Grace have been in a prolonged legal struggle over the federal agency dumping asbestos-contaminated soil removed from former mine properties a short distance from the mine site.

On Friday, U.S. District Judge Donald Falloy ruled that Grace must allow access to the mine site and two properties along

the Kootenai River found to contain asbestos contaminated soil.

"We're happy with the ruling," said Paul Peronard, on-site coordinator for the EPA. "I regret the interruption took place. It was time lost and we were stuck in time," he said. "That's my regret."

The EPA was in the process of cleaning up contaminated soil and buildings at the site of Grace's former processing plant when the company denied access to the mine. Eventually, Grace allowed the EPA to access the mine site for testing purposes but not to deposit contaminated materials. The Flyway is property immediately

upstream, along the Kootenai River, of the former sorting plant site. And the Bluffs are across the river, where a pipeline from the sorting plant, loaded vermiculite into train cars.

Peronard said EPA cleanup efforts will "remobilize" in April with hauling of asbestos-contaminated soil from the river sites to the mine tentatively scheduled for late May.

The EPA has 50,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil it wants to move to the mine site from the former sorting plant site.

Identified contamination on the Flyways and Bluffs properties is either piles or pits

along accesses on those properties and not as widespread as the sorting plant site, Peronard said.

The EPA has identified piles or pits of contaminated materials at the Flyway and Bluff sites but has not begun cleanup efforts on those properties.

Federal attorneys do expect an appeal of the court decision, Peronard said. But that should not delay hauling plans to the former mine site unless Grace seeks a restraining order.

Grace had no comment on the ruling as

See **Ruling** on Page 6

## Troy wins Western B divisional title



**DIVISIONAL CHAMPIONS** — Troy heads to the Class B State Tournament at Lewistown beginning Thursday. The team is Coach Rich Ramondelli, Kayla Meyer, Chelsea Manning, Destinie Meyer, Laura Mohar, Christina Aceves, Ronald Ridgeway and Hannah Coy. Seated are Tara Fahland, Jeni Ramondelli and Ashley Trulock.

Photo by Jerry Akda

## Two students suspended for making threats

By RAY STOUT  
Western News Reporter

Two Libby school students were suspended in separate incidents for using potentially threatening language, according to the district superintendent.

At Libby High School, a student had talked about "blowing up the school," said Superintendent Kirby Maki. "Student talked about that, made a threat, we investigated the matter, suspended the student for 10 days."

The suspension was issued March 6, Maki said. The matter is still under investigation by the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department, said County Attorney Bernie Cassidy.

Maki said he didn't know whether the student elaborated on the comments to other students. "Nobody found a bomb or anything. He talked about that; we take these things very seriously."

In recent years and even recent days, shootings, bombings or other mass violence have occurred at schools around the nation. In light of that, Maki said, the district will be holding in-service meetings to refresh staff on how to respond to potential threats.

Also, it will review the crisis management plan to be sure it's well-tuned, he said.

The issue was "a case where a kid was making threats, or was just mouthing off," Maki said. "Sometimes people get mad and they say things, but after all that's gone on in the last few years you need to follow up and investigate."

See **Threats** on Page 6

## EPA begins soil testing around high school track

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

The Environmental Protection Agency has started taking soil samples at and around the Libby High School track in an effort to determine if the area is contaminated with asbestos.

The school district used tailings from V.R. Grace's vermiculite mine and mill complex as a track surface from the early 1970s until 1983. The track was encapsulated with asphalt after Grace warned the district that asbestos fibers in the tailings could pose problems.

Last month district superintendent Kirby Maki asked the EPA to conduct tests, remove the tailings and replace them with fill material, and reinstall the track surface.

### Asbestos court bill moving forward

See Page 6

The EPA has started investigating school property to find where the contaminated material may have been spread, agency on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard said at last Thursday's Community Advisory Group meeting.

"This is not the best time to be sampling soil in Montana," Peronard said. "We're actually jackhammering our samples out of the ground."

Grace tested the track in 1981 and found what a company memo called "surprisingly

high" fiber concentrations stirred up by runners. On a hot, dry, windless July day, fiber concentrations were measured at .14 fibers per cubic centimeter of air for the lead runner and .22 fibers per cc for a following runner.

At the time of testing, the track was compacted due to recent rains and lack of use. No dust was visible.

According to the memo, short-term concentrations as high as 1.0 fibers per cc may have been possible when the track was in well-used condition and in use by a number of people.

The EPA has also started its second phase of air sampling at area homes, Peronard said. In the first scenario, residents will wear air monitors as they go

about their everyday activities. In the second scenario, EPA personnel will simulate housecleaning activities to see if any asbestos fibers are stirred up into the air. Fourteen houses have been lined up for the sampling, Peronard said.

The third scenario will probably start in early April and will take samples while EPA personnel are "mucking around" with vermiculite insulation to simulate remodeling activities, Peronard said. Three to six houses will be tested.

The final scenario will focus on vermiculite in soil to see if fibers are stirred up by gardening activities. It will probably start in May or June depending on the

See **CAG** on Page 6

## Head Start finds new home

Pre-school program to move in at Asa Wood School

By RAY STOUT  
Western News Reporter  
A home has been found for Kootenai Valley

40 four-year-olds, Chandler said. The school district stepped forward when it heard Head Start was about to request \$500,000



# CAG wants all vermiculite removed

**“We have a killer that we sleep with nightly and we’re not doing anything about it.”**

**Mike Powers**

By **ROGER MORRIS**  
Western News Publisher

Federal officials were told Thursday night that Libby residents want the vermiculite insulation cleaned out of their homes and businesses — now.

Members of the Citizens Advisory Group were unfazed by responses from the Environmental Protection Agency officials that Superfund law might not allow the federal agency to clean insulation from homes.

“It looks to me that it’s pretty well known that this stuff is not safe for puppy dogs or old curmudgeons like me,” said Mike Powers,

■ **Residents warned to leave removal to the experts**

*See Page 8*

■ **Local health plan developed for proposed medical trust**

*See Page 8*

who recently was diagnosed with a lung abnormality.

Powers is one of 128 people who didn’t work for W.R. Grace and recently learned he has a problem, most likely due to exposure to

vermiculite contaminated with asbestos.

“People are continuing to be exposed to this stuff,” Powers continued. “We have a killer that we sleep with nightly and we’re not doing anything about it.”

The frustration is the federal and state agencies are seeing the mounting reports of Libby area people whose health has been adversely affected by exposure to the vermiculite in the Libby area.

“For God’s sake let’s do something to remove this stuff,” he said. “It seems like

**See Vermiculite on Page**

## Vermiculite

Continued from Page 1  
nobody is willing to say ‘Yeah, this stuff should be removed.’”

Duc Nguyen, representing the EPA at the meeting, said the agency is continuing work on developing a better analysis technique and establishing a risk assessment.

Kerry Beasley, president of the board of directors of St. John’s Lutheran Hospital in Libby, asked Nguyen if it is safe to have undisturbed vermiculite insulation in a home.

“We don’t know at this point so we’re trying to advise people not to disturb it,” Nguyen said. “Tremolite is like a new animal to us and it’s better to not disturb it.”

Under Superfund law, the EPA

can clean up public areas if soil contamination or air contamination is involved, Nguyen said. “Nobody has an opinion yet on whether the EPA can clean up home insulation.”

It is estimated that the vermiculite from the Libby mine has been used as insulation in more than one million homes and businesses in the United States and in countless commercial applications. Last year, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported that the insulation was used in as many as 4 million homes.

Nguyen said there is a concern about setting precedent.

“I would think that the risk level in these homes in Libby, Montana, is high and I would think it would be a priority,” said Libby City Councilman George Bauer.

“All we can say is we’re working on it,” Nguyen replied.

“This question has been brought up over and over and over,” Bauer said. “These people are concerned.”

Dr. Brad Black, the county health officer, said Libby is in a unique situation compared to other communities in the country with a vermiculite problem.

“Libby has a very strong argument,” Black said. “We have a legitimate argument for cleaning up Libby.”

“This community is loaded.

We’re loaded and we don’t want a low level,” he said. “In Libby, Montana, the wide dispersal of this product has allowed a lot of people to get it in their lungs. A person in Kansas City, with it in their house, doesn’t have the same exposure. They didn’t go down and load it up for their garden, or play in the piles as a kid or breathe it in from the dust on the clothing of relatives.”

Nguyen said the federal agencies need to establish how people were exposed to the asbestos contaminated vermiculite. “Then we can justify why we want to remove it,” he said.

“I hear this community saying they want it all removed,” Beasley said.

“We’re afraid everything is going to come and go and we’re going to have homes full of vermiculite insulation,” Bauer said. “I don’t think Libby, Montana, will get a clean bill of health until every house is clean.”

CAG agreed to write a letter requesting that all vermiculite, especially insulation in homes and businesses, be removed from the community.

“I’m hearing what you are saying,” Nguyen said. “We don’t have the authority to do it. The answer is not yes or no. Tremolite is an unknown.”

Community medical trust **WESTERN NEWS JAN 31, 01**

## Task force releases health plan

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

A task force of Libby's Community Advisory Group has helped draw up what's intended to be an ideal medical plan for area residents suffering from asbestos-related diseases.

The only problem is, no one knows what the plan will cost or where the money will come from.

"We don't have a clue," said Rick Palagi, chief executive officer of St. John's Lutheran Hospital and a member of the CAG task force.

At this point, the best estimate of how much the plan might cost has been around \$500 million to treat 1,000 people over the next 40 years.

"Am I sure about that? No," Palagi said.

The plan, released in draft form at last Thursday's CAG meeting, was developed following complaints that a free medical plan offered by W.R. Grace was too restrictive in both eligibility requirements and coverage. Instead of using the Grace plan as a model, the CAG task force started with a clean sheet of paper, Palagi said.

"What we're suggesting is a full-benefit, no-compromise plan," he said.

In October, Palagi wrote a letter to the administrator of the Grace plan outlining a dozen changes that had been suggested by the CAG. They included easing residency requirements for eligibility, easing restrictions on the type of certification required for a physician to make a diagno-

sis qualifying a person for covered benefits, covering the cost of annual screenings and check-ups for people who are eligible to apply for the plan but who have not been diagnosed with a covered condition, and expanding benefits for counseling, respite care, home health care and long-term care.

The response indicated that few if any changes would be made to the plan.

"It was pretty much the status quo," Palagi said.

A common complaint about the Grace plan is its requirement that a person needs to have disease in both lungs to qualify.

"Anyone who is determined by a licensed physician to be afflicted with some kind of asbestos-related disease should be eligible, period," Palagi said.

Another area where the Grace plan is perceived to be deficient is in areas of coverage. While the plan is generous when compared to typical health plans offered by employers, it still doesn't go far enough in areas such as counseling and home-based care, Palagi said.

"The situation requires something different," he said. "It requires something more complete."

The lack of a guaranteed

source of funding for the Grace plan has also been a source of worry locally.

"The Grace plan has made no commitment of a reserve or a way that the plan would go on other than that the company says it chooses to fund it," Palagi said.

A community medical trust has been proposed as a source of funding for the plan drawn up by the CAG task force. The fund would have to be large enough to generate enough interest to cover expenses, Palagi said.

The absence of local control is another area where the Grace plan is seen as lacking. A community medical trust would be governed by a local board.

The difficulty of predicting the cost of the proposed plan stems in part from the fact that relatively little is known about asbestos-related diseases and in part from the fact that the number of affected people is still not known, Palagi said. A planned formal investigation by the county commissioners may help, as will the eventual release of statistics from health screenings conducted last summer and fall by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

"Every piece of information we get helps improve our guess," Palagi said.

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## CAG eyes \$8 million for cleanup

The Citizen Advisory Group is looking at Libby's \$8 million federal grant for economic development as a funding source to begin cleaning vermiculite insulation out of homes and businesses.

The group tried to pass a motion Thursday night to file an application for the money but decided to wait until the Feb. 8 meeting when missing board members returned.

The interest on the \$8 million could be used to clean up a few houses each year, said Lerah Parker.

Libby City councilman George Bauer said the annual interest was calculated to amount to about \$600,000.

"We don't need an opera house or an Olympic pool near as much as cleaning up our houses," said local businessman Mike Powers, who recently discovered through the health screenings that he had a lung abnormality.

Presently, the Libby Area Development Corporation is considering proposals for funding economic development projects.

Bauer said CAG initially voted

against applying for the funds from the economic development money. But the vote was close.

The \$8 million is for economic development and another \$3.5 million for St. John's Lutheran Hospital is to meet expanded health care needs of the community.

Burns' news release announcing the Senate approval of the funding for Libby said, the \$8 million would go to the city for "other asbestos-related health, environmental and economic needs."



WESTERN NEWS

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## Residents urged to not remove vermiculite without professional help

While members of the Citizens Advisory Group asked to have vermiculite insulation removed from their homes and business, they received warnings from fellow members, area residents and state and federal officials to leave the material in place for now.

"I'm right there with everyone else, I'd like to see it out of there," said County Sanitarian Ron Anderson during a CAG meeting Thursday night. "But we need to know if it's really a problem."

The Environmental Protection Agency has tested about 162 homes and other buildings in the Libby area and is trying to analyze the data at the same time they are developing a risk assessment procedure.

Lerah Parker walked to the front of the meeting wearing a white contamination suit, bright yellow boots, gloves and a respirator.

"In order to go into your home and clean up this insulation, this is what you need to wear," Parker said. "Don't think you can go into your house and clean everything out without the proper gear."

And training. She listed the various classes required before a person is licensed to remove asbestos.

Parker and her husband Mel were the owners of Raintree Nursery, once the site of the W.R. Grace sorting plant near the former vermiculite mine.

The couple worked outside in the nursery and tracked the asbestos dust into their home from outside. She said the worst dispersement came from their clothes drier. She said the dust collected in the drier after laundry was done and was regularly spewed into the air when the drier ran.

Their home was 10 times higher than the safe limit, Parker said.

The asbestos dust spread easily throughout the house, unknown to the couple until the EPA began testing.

"We don't want to wing around Libby in this suit and this mask doing a job we're not qualified for," Parker said. "We need help. We need trucks, we need people, we need help."

John Podolinsky from the Air and Waste Management Bureau for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, discouraged homeowner cleanup of the vermiculite insulation.

He expressed concerns that do-it-yourselfers would turn an already expensive job into something more expensive and more dangerous for everyone.

Strict state laws govern asbestos removal and air quality, he said.

There are 7-8 contractors statewide that do asbestos abatement.

## Asbestos group meets Feb. 1 at 7

The support group for people impacted by asbestos related disease will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 1, at 415 Louisiana Ave.

The mission of the group is to help people to identify the impacts of asbestos related stress on their lives and to work together for positive solutions. There is no charge to participants.

For more information, call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

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# 66 The delay has nothing to do with the severity or whether or not there are abnormalities on their X-rays. 99

## Screening letters delayed by glitch

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

Letters informing people of the results of their health screening for asbestos exposure have been delayed, according to a local representative of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

The letter notifies individuals that either his or her lungs are in good condition or could be impaired by asbestos from the now closed vermiculite mine.

Some letters haven't reached people yet because one of the specialist readers has been on sabbatical.

cal, said Dan Strausbaugh, the Libby-based contact for ATSDR. It doesn't mean people are in bad health, Strausbaugh said.

"The delay has nothing to do with the severity (of any problems) or whether or not there are abnormalities on their X-rays," Strausbaugh said. "It's completely independent of the medical status of the X-rays."

ATSDR conducted free screenings last year for eligible people in Libby and Elko, Nev., where mining families moved in search of mining jobs after the mine closed

in 1990. Altogether 6,200 people were screened.

Asbestos, an invisible, microscopic fiber, has been known to cause asbestosis, mesothelioma or lung cancers if inhaled.

The screening consisted of a personal interview, breathing test and three chest X-rays. The program in Libby lasted from July 5 through early November. In Elko people were screened for about a week in October.

Everyone was supposed to get letters about three months after testing. But some people tested in

July still haven't received letters, said Strausbaugh, though he didn't know how many people were still waiting.

The bottleneck was with the B-readers, he said. Those are devices that interpret the X-rays, and they're operated by specialists at universities around the country.

The program is using three B-readers - three people - to look at the 6,200 X-rays. Many of the photos had piled up on Reader No. 3's desk while he was on sabbatical

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## Letters

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leave, Strausbaugh said.

Before No. 3, the path followed by the X-rays is from ATSDR's contractor - the National Opinion Research Center - to No. 1, back to NORC, to No. 2, to NORC again, and then on to 3, Strausbaugh said.

"The delays are because of procedural problems that we think we've straightened out and have nothing to do with abnormalities on an X-ray," he said. "We're getting caught up."

He said 738 letters were sent last week to physicians and will be sent to the patients Thursday and Friday, Strausbaugh said. Another 850 letters will be mailed Feb. 6-8, he said.

Strausbaugh plans to present information at the Citizens Advisory Group meeting on Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room.

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# Opin

## Rolling up our sleeves

Libby is at it's best when we roll up our sleeves and tackle a job.

On Wednesday night, there was a call-to-arms for the community to collectively roll up its sleeves and help identify unresolved problems, issues and needs related to the asbestos contamination issue.

Once again, unity is needed.

The county commissioners are leading the effort, with considerable dependence on the Community Advisory Group. But all hands are needed.

Quite a few people at the meeting expressed a desire to remove vermiculite from the living areas of the community — from our buildings, soils, playgrounds and work areas.

Concern exists that all the money in the world and all the health care in the world won't be enough for the Libby community until the local population is protected from any exposure to asbestos-tainted vermiculite.

That's a tall order.

For the time being, officials are warning people to have patience while the Environmental Protection Agency continues testing and investigating whether or not vermiculite insulation poses a problem.

Up to now, the asbestos abatement industry, the people who remove asbestos products, has contended that as long as the material is encapsulated or sealed — so we can not have contact with it — it is safer than removing it.

The concern centers mainly around homes with vermiculite insulation in the walls and ceilings, the homes in which the presence of the material has to be declared when the real estate is sold, the presence of which is reducing the value of real estate.

People need to show some patience. We are not alone with this problem. The Minneapolis Star-Tribune reported that state government — Minnesota — has responded aggressively to information that the Libby vermiculite is the cause of deaths for 21 former W.R. Grace plant workers and three people who lived nearby. In that city, the EPA has already surveyed 400 homes near the plant site and will remove asbestos-laden soil from another 25 homes this spring.

The Minnesota health department is working on receiving a grant to survey about 2,700 homes in the area and about 6,000 current and former residents beginning in April.

Based on what we've seen here in Libby, it's not unreasonable to expect that in the next two years Minneapolis could see similar numbers of impact to human health that we are starting to see. That creates pressure for health, economic and political action on a broader level.

My point being: what to do with homes and buildings insulated with asbestos-tainted vermiculite is a national problem as is the question of how far does cleanup go.

Here in Libby, we need to roll up our sleeves and do what we do best: work together to solve a problem. There are limits to what we can do without some outside help but first we need to identify what it is we want to do.

Answers to those nagging questions we've had about our homes for nearly a year will come faster if the EPA investigators are given space and support with less harassment.

The commissioners will be deciding how this "investigative effort" proceeds. It will start with a proclamation and it could end with a lawsuit or the threat of a suit.

Before we get that far, has anybody approached W.R. Grace and asked what kind of additional help can we get with cleanups, vermiculite removal from homes or even medical trusts?

*Just a thought. — Roger Morris*

## County hearing on asbestos issues



Lincoln County Commissioner Rita Windom looks on as Rob Orr of Libby, a former W.R. Grace employee recently diagnosed with asbestosis, made a plea Wednesday night to clean up all the vermiculite in Libby for the sake of his children and their children.

# County to begin investigation

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

The Lincoln County Commissioners unveiled plans at a public hearing Wednesday night for a formal investigation that could lay the groundwork for legal action against W.R. Grace.

A formal investigation is a rare action for a county commission or state legislature to take, said attorney Mike Donovan, who specializes in representing state and local governments in public health issues.

"Any legislative body, when it does that, has an awesome amount of authority," Donovan said.

A formal investigation would give the commissioners subpoena authority for gathering information, Donovan said. Witnesses could be called, sworn and compelled to testify

during public proceedings.

Donovan lives in Helena and works for a California-based law firm. He said he is not being paid but has offered himself to the county as an information source.

While a lawsuit against Grace has been suggested as a possible source of funding for a community medical trust for people with asbestos-related diseases, Commissioner Rita Windom said Wednesday it's premature to discuss legal action.

"What we're talking about is an investigation — a formal investigation," she said. "We're looking to find the facts."

The community has been hurt by asbestos contamination associated with Grace's former vermiculite mine and is in need of relief, Windom said. County government is committed to

taking action to help, but needs input on what it should do, she said.

Many in the crowd of about 100 people gathered at the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall expressed support for the county's plan to conduct an investigation. Several spoke out on the need for funding for community health care and for money to help clean up asbestos contamination on private property.

Asbestos victims advocate Gayla Benefield said her only concern is that the county not take action that would compromise the rights of people to bring their own lawsuits against Grace.

"We want to see those rights protected," she said.

Cleaning up all asbestos contami-

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## Part 2 CONT Public meeting

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nation in the community should be a priority, Rob Orr said.

Orr suffers from asbestosis and said he would gladly give his life to ensure that his children would grow up without exposure to asbestos. The community can't rely on W.R. Grace to bail it out, he said.

"The cold hard facts are, we've got to clean it up or it's not going to get cleaned up," he said.

Assistance is needed in removing asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation from area homes, Orr said.

"If you come to Libby to buy a home, what's the first question you're going to ask?" Orr said. "What kind of insulation is in it?"

The county has established a voluntary registry for homes and businesses containing vermiculite insulation. About 160 have been registered so far, county sanitarian Ron Anderson said.

"People who are interested in moving to Libby are going to want to know if there's an asbestos presence here," Anderson said.

A subcommittee of Libby's



Attorney Mike Donovan, who specializes in representing state and local governments in public health issues, is advising the commissioners.

Community Advisory Group for asbestos issues is working on an alternative to a free medical plan offered by W.R. Grace to people with asbestos-related diseases.

About 90 people have signed up for the Grace plan, which has been criticized on the grounds that it doesn't adequately meet long-term health-care needs and that its eligibility criteria are too restrictive.

A medical trust has been proposed as a source of funding for the alternative health plan. It has been estimated that \$500 million could be needed over the next 30 to 40 years, said Rick Palagi, chief executive officer of St. John's Lutheran Hospital.

"That's a lot of money, especially when you realize my hospital operates on a budget of around \$10 million per year," he said.

W.R. Grace should be the primary source of funding for a medical trust, Palagi said.

According to county health officer Dr. Brad Black, 184 people in the community have been confirmed to be suffering from asbestos-related diseases as a result of recent health screenings. The majority of those are new cases in addition to the close to 300 people who had previously been diagnosed, Black said.

Of the 184, 128 did not work for W.R. Grace or have immediate family members who worked for Grace. At that rate, Libby could end up with 300 to 400 cases of asbestos-related disease from non-occupational exposure by the time the screening and followup program is finished, Black said.

The county needs to address a variety of issues, including healthcare, asbestos removal and economic impacts associated with negative publicity about asbestos contamination, Windom said. There isn't time to take them one at a time, she said.

"We need to be working diligently to see that all of these issues are addressed simultaneously," she said.

The commissioners plan to draft a resolution to establish a direction for their investigation. The draft resolution will be published and comments will be taken before official action is taken, probably at the commissioners' Jan. 31 meeting, Windom said.

# Crismore bill seeks judge to hear cases

By ROGER MORRIS  
Western News Publisher

The state Legislature will be considering a bill to add a second district court judge in Lincoln County to hear a backlog of asbestos-related civil suits filed against W.R. Grace.

The bill is proposed by State Sen. Bill Crismore of Libby and supported by Republican legislative leaders.

The temporary judge would hear only the civil suits filed against Grace. About 80 suits are pending in district court and the number could grow significantly as more Libby area residents are identified through public health screenings as having an asbestos-related disease.

About 2-3 cases are being heard a year.

"This judge would do nothing but the asbestos cases and would probably, most of the time, be in Missoula," Crismore said. "That could change depending on where a court room was available."

Crismore said he has the support of judges and attorneys on both sides of the issue. And Republican leaders of the state house and senate have indicated support for the proposed bill.

"So it has the support of both sides plus the support of the judicial system from our district court on up," the senator said.

"I made a commitment about four months ago that I was going to work on this and I've had tremendous help and support," Crismore said. "The bill would set precedent in helping compensate victims of an environmental error."

Crismore still faces the hurdle of finding funding for the proposal. It is estimated to cost \$500,000 for the first two years.

"That's the real challenge," Crismore continued. "Passing the bill isn't a challenge, it's finding the funding."

The Libby legislator is pursuing several different options and has talked with U.S. Senator Max Baucus and U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns about finding federal grants. Crismore is also going to discuss options with the Environmental Protection Agency, who has been conducting cleanups and investigations in the Libby area for the past year.

Another option may be a piece of the tobacco settlement money, Crismore said. He noted that a high percentage of the asbestos victims were smokers and medical reports have shown that smoking significantly increases the likelihood of developing an asbestos-related disease.

"There are a lot of options out there," Crismore said.

He said State Rep. Aubyn Curtiss has signed on

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## Second judge —

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to the bill and is willing to carry it in the house. Libby Rep. Eileen Carney has also said she will support the bill.

The proposal had not been designated a senate bill number as of Thursday morning but is identified as LC-0875.01

More than 120 individual cases have been filed against Grace in district court in Libby. While other cases, including class action suits, have been filed across the country.





# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: I participated in the medical testing program. If I did not get a telephone call shortly following my medical testing informing me of any abnormalities, does that mean that my tests were completely normal?**

**A:** No, not necessarily. It is possible that you will be informed of an abnormality on your chest x-ray or lung function tests in the letter ATSDR will send you. Some test participants were notified of an abnormality by telephone immediately following their examination. These calls were made when the abnormality was found to require an immediate evaluation by a physician. Abnormalities which did not require immediate medical attention, or were identified by physicians in later reviews will be reported to participants by mail. The letters notifying participants of their test results are being sent as the reviews of the x-rays are completed by all reviewing physicians.

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# EDC pursues "brownfields" EPA funding

BY BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

The Lincoln County Economic Development Council is seeking a \$200,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency aimed at the redevelopment of contaminated sites.

The grant is part of EPA's "brownfields" program. A brownfield is a site that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse.

The EDC plans to use nearly half of the \$200,000 to identify and assess brownfields in the Libby-Troy area and make recommendations for redevelopment. Another portion of the money would be used to study the economic impact of recent negative publicity about asbestos contamination associated with the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

The EDC's grant application budgets \$96,000 for environmental assessment, \$45,000 for economic assessment, \$19,000 for community outreach and \$40,000 for project management.

The assessment of possibly contaminated sites would not focus on former Grace properties but would look at other locations such as mill, railroad and landfill sites. The former Champion mill complex next to Libby City Hall and the former Troy municipal landfill site have been identified as likely candidates for successful cleanup and reuse.

The information gathered would help identify sites that could be used by businesses looking to relocate to southern Lincoln County. According to information in the grant application, the assessment would assist in the recruitment of two businesses currently considering a move to Libby or Troy and six to 10 businesses expected to be recruited with the help of incentives offered by the Libby Area Development Co.

"With the recent aggressive economic promotion of Lincoln County, numerous companies have expressed an interest in researching opportunities in this area," the EDC notes in the grant application. "However, the availability and effective identification of suitable land has complicated effective economic promotion. Consequently, there is an unmistakable need to

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## EPA grant

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determine which sites are usable or can be remediated for development. With the history of environmental contamination in this area, the risks are considerable for companies looking to develop land."

Another component of the project would be to study economic impacts from negative publicity about asbestos contamination in the Libby area. An economic development consulting firm would be contracted to research the issue.

The \$19,000 budgeted for community outreach would be used to provide information to the community and gather public input.

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# Public hearing set on suing Grace

“A lot depends on what we hear from the public.”

Rita Windom  
Commissioner

Lincoln County Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 17, at the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall to discuss a possible lawsuit against W.R. Grace that could be used to set up a public health care trust.

The county has invited several attorneys experienced in public health issues to the hearing. Some preliminary discussions on legal options have taken place but more information will be available Wednesday evening, Commissioner Rita Windom said.

“A lot depends on what we hear

from the public and what we actually hear from the lawyers at this meeting,” she said.

Topics to be discussed include:

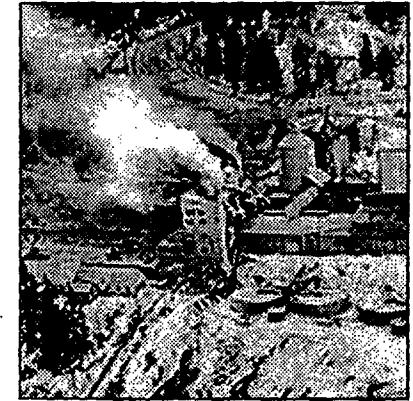
- The impacts of asbestos to the county.
- The option for the county government to take no action.
- The possible enactment of a county health ordinance addressing the abatement of hazardous substances.
- The potential creation and funding of a public trust to provide health care for county residents impacted by asbestos.

● The possible options for funding any county response to these issues.

Enacting an ordinance addressing asbestos contamination from the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine could lay the groundwork for a lawsuit against Grace, Windom said. A successful suit could provide funding for a public health trust.

A subcommittee of the Libby Community Advisory Group is working on a health plan aimed at

See **Public hearing** on Page 5



Grace mill facility at mine site.

## Public hearing—

Continued from Page 1  
remedying perceived deficiencies in a free plan offered by W.R. Grace, but a source of money for the trust has not been secured.

One shortcoming identified in the Grace plan is that a person must have an asbestos-related problem in both lungs to qualify. People who are uninsured and have an asbestos-related problem in one lung could find themselves unable to get insurance.

Windom said most of the comments she has received thus far about the possibility of suing Grace have been supportive of the idea.

“I had a local businessman come up to me at Ace Hardware the other day and say it’s absolutely the right thing to do,” she said.

No decision will be made on the matter until after Wednesday’s hearing, Windom stressed.

“It’s a big step for us and we’re not going to do it lightly,” she said.

A second public hearing, on Wednesday, Jan. 31, will focus on a proposal to apply for a federally funded clinic to provide low-cost healthcare. The proposal grew out of studies showing that many Lincoln County residents are medically uninsured or underinsured.

The clinic would provide general health care for the community and would not be focused on asbestos-related diseases. The clinic would be open to the public, and a sliding fee scale would be established with a minimum fee of \$5.

Mary Beth Frideres of the Montana Primary Care Association is providing guidance on the clinic proposal. Frideres is scheduled to attend the meeting along with association director Alan Strange and Dr. Aubrey Miller, a U.S. Public Health Service environmental emergency and hazard specialist who has been working on Libby asbestos issues.

## Community faces opportunity to stand and be heard on asbestos issues

To the Editor:

As I write this letter, my hand shakes and my heart races. Am I really going to confess publicly about the disease I contracted when I was an adventurous young teenager running around the playing fields and attending school in Libby?

That was almost 50 years ago, long before "safe sex" was popular. I understand many of my childhood friends and classmates are now learning they also have this disease. Some already have died, far too young.

I am told by medical professionals that nothing can be done. Some procedures will extend longevity, but not the quality of my life, and the disease is terminal. It will eventually kill me unless something else does first. Penicillin, antibiotics, DNA studies and computer models — nothing can reverse this killer. Nothing at all.

I am speaking of asbestosis. I have it, and as we know, many of you in Lincoln County have it. Now, some people have told me to just accept it, and honestly, I have found that very few really care except those who have the disease. Oh, our U.S. Senators brought in money to help the economic situation caused by the resulting negative publicity, but the money is nothing more than "chump change" compared with what we have lost in

property values.

And now our 30- and 35-year-old citizens are being told that they too have this dreaded disease, brought home perhaps by their fathers. Imagine, their very own fathers subjecting their children to a disease that can eventually kill.

Bulletin — this just in: Asbestos-related disease is not a venereal disease. It is not something to be ashamed of.

Until just recently, none of us realized just how deadly this terrible disease is, or how many of our friends and neighbors have been exposed to tremolite. At one time asbestosis was thought by some as an occupational disease, similar to the black lung that many coal miners have suffered. No one thought that if you had never worked at the W.R. Grace mine you would be at risk of acquiring asbestosis — at least it never occurred to me that I was at risk. And, of course, no one at W.R. Grace said a word about it.

But surely no American company would knowingly expose so many people to a killer disease for the sake of its company's bottom line. Surely not. And surely, when a company became aware that the material it was mining and processing could lead to lung, heart or organ disease it would tell its faithful, trusting employees to protect themselves and their families. Surely any

large American business would show a human side and warn of such a danger. But as we have seen, in the case of W.R. Grace, I'm afraid no such human side was shown to us.

I'm mad as hell and I won't take it any longer. To hell with, "You've got to learn how to deal with it," and "Take some stress management programs, sit back and let the government take care of it. The county commissioners are involved now."

No. No. No! I want to write to every media outlet in America, and probably will. I want to shout, "Don't let 'em snow you. Wake up! Get up and fight, if not for yourself, then for the asbestos victims who surely are coming behind us."

My only "sin" in contracting this disease was being born in Libby and loving this beautiful place. That is why I returned to Libby after 20 years of military service — to be near my family and friends, and these mountains and our clear running streams that tell me every day that I am alive and that I want to continue to live and watch the snow come and go, and the streams fill, and the summers come and go, and all the seasons change.

Now, we as a community have one opportunity to stand and be heard. A California law firm is here to see about representing Lincoln County in a suit to force W.R.

Grace to finance a health clinic. Open meetings to decide on a direction are scheduled. Have heard the figure of \$50 million to fund the project. These dollars might last five or ten years, but after that, the victims who come behind us will once again have to try to raise funding.

W.R. Grace will probably be an ancient history by then and old news, which we all know — no news at all. And yet asbestosis will continue to be a health problem for perhaps another 50 years. Are the attorneys' fees are deducted from the settlement or judgment, \$0 million does not seem to me to be sufficient funding for both the extent and seriousness of our local health problems and the outrageous concern W.R. Grace has shown for human life.

We have an opportunity to be heard. One more chance to influence our elected officials to fight a more meaningful fight for us. There is a county commissions meeting scheduled for Jan. 1 and Jan. 31. This meeting just might be our final opportunity to make a statement in the defense of those among us who are innocent victims of a terminal disease, and against bottom-line policy by a major American corporation. We need to be at this meeting. After all, who will help us if we are not even interested in helping ourselves?

Jim Racicot

## W.R. Grace's answer to community's healthcare requests pretty clear

To the Editor:

By 1935, it was known that asbestos caused lung disease. By 1956, the State of Montana knew that the mine in Libby had a serious asbestos problem. The State of Montana's occupational health agency asked that efforts be made to reduce the hazard to the workers. These requests continued for many years that followed. Steps were taken to reduce the asbestos levels in the workplace, obviously those steps were highly inadequate.

It is hard to believe that a state health official could go to that mine/mill site and not see the plume of dust coming out of the dry mill. It is also hard to believe that it never occurred to these health officials that maybe this asbestos dust might be going to the entire population in the area. Hundreds of tons of asbestos dust were spewing from that mountain each year and the state had, evidently, no concern for the surrounding populations.

Evidently, at some point the federal government came to the realization that asbestos is deadly, toxic. OSHA began lowering the Permissible Exposure Level (PEL) in the occupational setting (exposure levels allowed over an 8-hour work day).

In occupational settings, optical microscopes are used to do fiber counts, with the size limit being longer than 5 microns in length, and measured per cubic centimeter of air (fibers/cc). For comparison, the typical sugar cube would measure just over 3 cubic centimeters (cc). In 1971, OSHA set an occupational Permissible Exposure Level of 12.0 fibers/cc. In 1972, this level was reduced to 5.0 fibers/cc. By 1976, the Permissible Exposure Level was reduced to 2 fibers/cc. In 1986, this occupational Permissible Exposure

Level was reduced to 0.2 fibers/cc. Today's Permissible Exposure Level in an occupational setting is set by OSHA at 0.1 fibers/cc.

In December 1975, during a rainy period, W.R. Grace sampled the air in downtown Libby, resulting in fiber counts ranging as high as 1.5 fibers/cc. This means that the people who lived in Libby at that time in 1975, were exposed to 15 times the level of asbestos air pollution currently allowed by OSHA in the occupational setting. The resident, exposed to this level of air pollution, would have inhaled over 20 million toxic asbestos fibers in a 24-hour period.

In 1980, Midwest Research Institute, commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), came up with an optical count of .5 fibers/cc, outside Libby, during a time in October when it had been raining. This October 1980 count was after the new wet mill was in operation, which came on line in the mid 1970's. While data is limited, it is safe to say that these were not isolated instances and that during dry weather times and periods of inversions over Libby, asbestos fiber counts could have been much higher.

W.R. Grace ceased operations in 1990. This would highly suggest that EPA as well as the State of Montana, not to mention W.R. Grace, had no concern for the safety of the populations of Lincoln County, Montana. Maybe the people of Lincoln County should let government off the hook and just say "you guys shouldn't have been sleeping on the job."

W.R. Grace did what industry does — make a profit and get away with as much as you can. This is why we have government agencies such as the EPA, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and

Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, to oversee industry and to make sure what happened here, doesn't happen. These government agencies are entrusted by the people, so that we don't have to walk around with microscopes, testing the air we breathe.

Our governments have grossly failed us, and what do we get? We get to live with diseases and death, and we get to listen to government say, "don't come to us for your long-term health needs." Does W.R. Grace really care about our health or health care? Their contribution in the form of asbestos has made the answer pretty clear.

We are a population that have been exposed, without choice, to a toxic substance that will bring us cancer, disability, suffocation and death. If government has any dignity or compassion, the people of Lincoln County, Montana will be compensated with the finest, full medical coverage, that is honored, where we may choose to seek treatment. We will also be compensated with the diligent research effort that is needed to find the answers to curing the diseases that we are faced with.

We will be provided with reclamation efforts that will provide a

clean environment for our future. The people will be provided educational programs that will teach us about the toxicity of tremolite asbestos and what past exposure means to our health. Education that might afford us the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding our health care. We will be provided with air quality monitoring on a weekly basis, which will inform us of asbestos fiber counts for all size fibers.

The people of Libby and Lincoln County have the right to know. This environmental disaster has impacted our health, our economy and many of us will have been robbed of our golden years. We were given no choice.

Finally, the people of Lincoln County are encouraged by the new faces of the EPA and ATSDR, Paul Peronard and crew who have presented themselves with sincerity and heartfelt concern. We feel that if provided with the means, these folks will do what is right for the people and our environment. Our federal government spends billions of tax dollars on smart bombs, in the name of keeping Americans out of harm's way, we too are Americans.

Clinton Maynard

## Asbestos group meets Thursday

The support group for individuals impacted by asbestos related disease will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 18, at 415 Louisiana Ave.

The group's mission is to help people identify the impacts of asbestos-related stress and work together for solutions. There is no charge to participants. For more information, on this and other upcoming groups, call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

JAN 17, 2001

WESTERN NEWS



# ASK EPA!!

WESTERN NEWS  
JAN 10, 2001

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: I've heard that Libby may get an EPA grant for economic redevelopment. Does EPA do economic development?**

**A:** In mid-January, the City of Libby will submit an application for a Brownfields Assessment Pilot Grant. This competitive grant process awards \$200,000 grants to states, cities and other political subdivisions, such as universities, to assess "Brownfields" sites for economic redevelopment potential. The link to EPA is that a significant portion of the money is used for environmental assessment. The money can not be used for cleanup nor for construction.

A Brownfield site is defined as a site or portion of a site, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. Often these sites are not developed or reused because potential developers fear of environmental contamination.

The application proposes that the grant be managed by the Lincoln County Economic Development Council. Proposed activities include environmentally assessing sites in the Libby/Troy area for contamination and choosing several sites in the Libby/Troy area for contamination and choosing several sites for redevelopment. The proposal also includes a suggestion by the Community Advisory Group to do an economic impact assessment to determine what the economic impact of the asbestos crisis has been on the economy of Libby.

For more information call:

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150 x241

# Judge rules in favor of mediation

## EPA told to negotiate with Grace for access

A federal judge in Missoula has ordered the Environmental Protection Agency and W.R. Grace to work out their problems in mediation.

At issue is EPA access to Grace's former vermiculite mine property near Libby.

"We have to all come together before the end of the month or it comes back to the court," said local Grace representative Alan Stringer.

Grace has sought mediation all along, Stringer said.

The EPA sued Grace last fall after Grace locked the agency out of former company property now owned by Kootenai Development Corporation. Grace's action came it bought a controlling interest in KDC.

Attorneys for Grace and the EPA argued their points in court during a two-hour hearing on Dec. 20.

EPA is seeking access to property Grace sold to KDC after Grace's vermiculite mine closed in 1990.

KDC owns the mine site itself as well as property adjacent to and across the

river from the former screening plant site at the mouth of Rainy Creek. After initially barring EPA from the property completely, Grace granted access to the KDC properties for investigative purposes only.

Access for the investigation was granted only after EPA informed Grace that it was filing an application for a warrant, said EPA on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard.

EPA also seeks to conduct cleanup operations on the riverfront properties and to use the mine site to dispose of

See **Access ruling** on Page 5

## Access ruling

Continued from Page 1  
asbestos-contaminated materials excavated from the former screening plant location. The asbestos occurred as a contaminant in the vermiculite ore.

Grace has little basis to deny access for an investigation, Peronard said. But access standards for cleanup operations are higher, and EPA must show that hazardous materials are present and that they are a threat to public safety, he said.

According to Stringer, the company refused access to the mine site for disposal purposes because of concerns about asphalt and other

contaminants that could be in the materials excavated from the former screening facility.

With work on hold for the winter, EPA has stockpiled 50,000 cubic yards of excavated soil at the screening plant. The cost of transporting the contaminated soil out of the area for disposal has been estimated at \$4.5 million.

An EPA contractor is conducting the cleanup of the former screening plant. The agency will attempt to recover costs from Grace after the cleanup is finished.

At the former export plant in Libby, now the site of the city's

industrial park, a contractor working for Grace conducted the cleanup under the order from EPA. Material removed from the export plant site has been deposited at the former mine.

# Decision pending on EPA's mine access suit

A dispute between the Environmental Protection Agency and W.R. Grace over access to its former vermiculite mine property near Libby is in the hands of a federal judge in Missoula.

The EPA sued Grace last fall after Grace locked the agency out of former company property now owned by Kootenai Development Corporation. Grace's actions came after the company bought a control-

ling interest in KDC.

Attorneys for Grace and the EPA argued their points in federal court in Missoula on Dec. 20. The hearing lasted about two hours, and the parties are awaiting a ruling from the judge.

"We figure we'll get some sort of decision here shortly, but we haven't heard anything from the judge," said Denver-based EPA on-scene coordinator Paul

Peronard.

At issue is EPA's access to property Grace sold to KDC after Grace's vermiculite mine closed in 1990.

KDC owns to mine site itself as well as property adjacent to and across the river from the former screening plant site at the mouth of Rainy Creek. After initially barring EPA from the property completely, Grace granted access to the KDC properties

for investigative purposes only.

Access for the investigation was granted only after EPA informed Grace that it was filing an application for a warrant, Peronard said.

EPA also seeks to conduct cleanup operations on the riverfront properties and to use the mine site to dispose of asbestos-

See **EPA** on Page 8

## EPA

Continued from Page 1.  
contaminated materials excavated from the former screening plant location. The asbestos occurred as a contaminant in the vermiculite ore.

Grace has little basis to deny access to an investigation, Peronard said. But access standards for cleanup operations are higher, and EPA must show that hazardous materials are present

and that they are a threat to public safety, he said.

The matter will likely be resolved in court, Peronard said.

According to a spokesman for Grace, the company has refused access to the mine site for disposal purposes because of concerns about asphalt and other contaminants that could be in the materials excavated

from the former screening facility.

With work on hold for the winter, EPA has stockpiled 50,000 cubic yards of excavated soil at the screening plant. The cost of transporting the contaminated soil out of the area for disposal has been estimated at \$4.5 million.

An EPA contractor is conducting the cleanup of the former screening

plant. The agency will attempt to recover costs from Grace after the cleanup is finished.

At the former export plant in Libby, now the site of the city's industrial park, a contractor working for Grace is conducting the cleanup under the scope of an order from EPA. Material removed from the export plant site has been deposited at the former mine.



# County schedules hearings

## Meetings scheduled on Grace suit, clinic

The Lincoln County Commissioners are planning two public hearings later this month to discuss a possible lawsuit against W.R. Grace and a proposal to apply for a federally-funded clinic to provide low-cost community health care.

The county had initially planned to combine both hearings on Jan. 17, but an increase in the number of people expected to participate in the clinic discussion led to a second hearing being scheduled.

The meeting on the possible lawsuit is planned for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 17, in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall.

The meeting on the health clinic will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 31, also in the Ponderosa Room.

Plans for a public meeting on a possible lawsuit against Grace were developed after the county commissioners and county attorney met with attorneys last month to discuss legal strategies for funding a medical trust to fund health care for area residents with asbestos-related diseases. A lawsuit against W.R. Grace, which owned the mine that produced asbestos-tainted vermiculite, is a possibility.

"Lincoln County is looking at an ordinance that would declare tremolite asbestos a public nuisance, and the manufacturers of products containing tremolite asbestos could be held accountable for remediation of physical consequences," Commissioner Rita Windom said.

A subcommittee of the Libby Community Advisory Group is working on a health plan aimed at remedying perceived deficiencies in a free plan offered by W.R. Grace, but a source of money for the trust has not been secured.

**“Lincoln  
County is  
looking  
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public  
nuisance.”**

**Rita Windom,  
Commissioner**

**County hearings**  
Continued from Page 1  
The Jan. 31 meeting will focus on a proposal to apply for a federally funded clinic to provide low-cost healthcare. The proposal grew out of studies showing that many Lincoln County residents are medically uninsured or underinsured.

The clinic would provide general health care for the community and would not be focused on asbestos-related diseases. The clinic would be open to the public, and a sliding fee scale would be established with a minimum fee of \$5.  
Mary Beth Frideres of the Mon-

tana Primary Care Association is providing guidance on the clinic proposal.  
Frideres is scheduled to attend the Jan. 31 meeting along with associa-

tion director Alan Strange and Dr. Aubrey Miller, a U.S. Public Health Service environmental emergency and hazard specialist working on Libby asbestos issues.

WESTERN NEWS

JAN 5, 2001



# Opin

## Getting Involved

If January 2001 is an indication of the year to come, brace yourself.

Based on the important meetings scheduled during the next few weeks, civic involvement could become an occupation for many people. The important thing is for people, lots of people, to become involved.

Here's a rundown of what's coming:

On Monday, Jan. 8, the Libby Board of adjustments Adjustments will be once again looking at a variance for a zoning change to allow Kootenai Paving to locate an asphalt plant on property near city hall owned by Mayor Tony Berget and his family. That meeting is at city hall at 7 p.m.

On Saturday, Jan. 13, the Fish, Wildlife and Parks will be taking public comments on proposed hunting regulations for the 2001-2002 hunting seasons. The big change proposed is a return of whitetail doe hunting to most districts in the northwest part of the state. That meeting is at the West Coast Hotel, formerly Cavanaugh's, in Kalispell at 10 a.m.

On Jan. 17, Lincoln County Commissioners will hold a public meeting at 7 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room to discuss suing W.R. Grace to help establish a community medical trust. I've been throwing around the figures \$50 million as needed to start the trust. I'm told it's more like \$500 million.

The Libby Area Development Corporation meets Jan. 29 at 7 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room to begin reviewing proposals for funding projects and programs in the Libby-Troy area. LADC is making recommendations to pass along to the city council on how to best use the \$8.5 million in economic development money we received from the federal government.

The county commissioners have another public meeting scheduled Jan. 31 to discuss applying for a federal-funded clinic to provide low-cost community health care. There's several scenarios how this could work in conjunction with St. John's Lutheran Hospital or separately. The idea surfaced from the Citizens Advisory Group meetings dealing with asbestos-related matters. A survey indicates community residents are medically underserved because of the lack of health insurance and other economic conditions.

In addition to the meetings, there is a Jan. 16 deadline for people or groups with standing to file a final protest on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecological Management Plan. There is a Jan. 22 deadline to comment on the

~~Forest Service about a proposed land exchange between~~  
~~the Forest Service and the USFS Forest Service dealing~~  
~~with property along Bull Lake, the Idaho border~~  
~~and Montana~~

~~we should be hearing a federal court decision on the~~  
~~EPA's suit against Grace seeking access to the former~~  
~~mine site so federal agency contractors can complete the~~  
~~cleanup of the companies company's former screening~~  
~~plant at the mouth of Rainy Creek.~~

Then, too, we have a new Legislature meeting with a new governor in office and we have a new president coming to office with an evenly divided congress already in place.

There are also a myriad of community meetings going on dealing with festivals, cultural centers, swimming pools, museums, and much more.

If nothing else, it could be interesting. I strongly suggest people get involved or forever hold their tongue.. —

Roger Morris



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers

about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

JAN 3, 2001

WESTERN NEWS

**Q: Is ATSDR's mortality study related to the medical screening?**

**A:** No. The Medical Screening and the Mortality Study are two different things.

The Medical Screening was designed to check Libby residents for evidence of lung disease. Over 6,000 people were screened and ATSDR has begun to send out the results to those people who participated in the program.

The Mortality Study is a review of death certificates from 1979 to 1998 to determine underlying causes of death for residents of the Libby area. The review was conducted to compare death rates for residents of the Libby area with those in Montana and in the United States for selected diseases associated with exposure to asbestos.

The Mortality Study showed that deaths from asbestosis were approximately 40-60 times higher than expected. Deaths from mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer, also appeared to be higher than expected. The number of deaths over that time period from other causes, including lung cancer and digestive cancer, was lower than expected.

For more information, call:

Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR Montana Representative at 293-2728 or  
Steve Dearwent, Mortality Study Author at 404-639-0669

# Residents lived with catastrophic fire threat

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the second part of a Review of the Year 2000 as reported in the pages of The Western News. The first part appeared in the Wednesday, Dec. 27, newspaper.

The controversial "rally" against government policies in the West was quickly forgotten during the second half of the year as Montanans worried about increasingly volatile fire conditions in the surrounding forests.

**July 5**

Rick Maedje has withdrawn as the Republican candidate for county commissioner following a challenge from three Reform Party candidates on the grounds that he does not meet residency requirements. Maedje said he still believed he was qualified but taking the matter to court would result in a long and expensive legal proceeding.

**July 7**

Kootenai River flows could remain at 8,000 cubic-feet per second for the remainder of the summer, but Lake Koocanusa will fill no higher than 17 feet below full pool. As of July 5, Koocanusa was 29 feet below full pool, and the latest stream forecast is calling for below average flows into the reservoir.

**July 12**

Beyond a brief back up at the X-ray machine, local asbestos health screenings have gone "great" in its first five days, according to federal officials. Since beginning on Wednesday, July 5, 133 people have been examined.

**July 14**

John Brown is the new mayor of Troy, the third mayor in eight months for the city. He replaces Rod Johnson, who served as



The Elk Bath picture taken Aug. 6 in the East Fork of the Bitterroot River on the Sula Fire Complex in southwest Montana came to be a defining image of the Montana wildfires. The digital photo was taken by John McColgan of the Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Fire Service working with the Alaskan Type I Incident Management Team

mayor from 1994-1998 and was appointed in early December 1999 after Barbara Anderson resigned. Johnson said he couldn't devote the amount of time needed to be mayor because of a full-time job working at the Troy Mine.

**July 19**

The potential for wildfire is worrying officials at the Kootenai National Forest. Fuels are starting to cure out, said Charlie

Webster, the forest fire management officer. "It's changing rapidly out there," Webster said. "We're on the edge now. It'll go from green, where it won't burn, to brown, where it'll burn really rapidly."

**July 21**

The 24-18 Libby Loggers head to the American Legion baseball district tournament this week following a pair of wins at Bonners Ferry. Outfielder and pitcher Kyle

Volkers finished the regular season with 21 home runs, tying the state record.

**July 26**

W.R. Grace is barring the Environmental Protection Agency from the former Zonolite Mine site and other property owned by Kootenai Development Corp. following Grace's purchase of two-thirds of KDC's stock. The company is concerned with personal injury liability issues and with EPA's proposal to return asbestos-contaminated materials to the mine site, said local Grace spokesman Alan Stringer.

**July 28**

The number of Kootenai National Forest firefighters sent to combat blazes in other areas has topped out as the local fire danger remains high. About 100 KNF employees are currently on fire duty elsewhere in the country.

**Aug. 2**

Sandra Honeychurch, a 22-year teacher at Libby Public Schools, has replaced Jackie O'Brien as the new principal of Asa Wood Elementary. O'Brien had been approved earlier this year following the retirement of Shirley Chase but asked to be released from her contract after marrying a man who has a home in Sandpoint. O'Brien had most recently been the superintendent and principal of Trout Creek School.

**Aug. 4**

The streak of no fires on the Kootenai National Forest ended Tuesday when a "very small" blaze drew firefighters on the west side, according to Forest Service officials. So far this season, the Kootenai had been spared the flames other forests are battling.

See **Year in Review** on Page 5



# Year in Review

Continued from Page 1

Aug. 9

brush fires are premium and a storm could fan the fire any hour, but the Kootenai National Forest is "very fortunate" compared to the blazing Bitterroot region which needs the most firefighters, according to a Kootenai spokesman. The only wildfire on the forest as of Tuesday morning was the 173-acre Elk Mountain Fire. The mountain stands about two miles east of the Wolf Creek Road.

Aug. 11

Fire conditions Tuesday pushed the Elk Mountain fire "over the hill" as it got out of control, said a Kootenai National Forest fire spokesman. The fire, burning on the boundary of the Kootenai and Flathead national forests, nearly doubled as it moved into heavy fuels, said spokesman Jim Merzhon. He guessed it was close to 400 acres Thursday morning.

Aug. 16

The Kootenai National Forest joined the rest of the burning West last weekend when 165 lightning fires started from thunderstorms on Aug. 10-11. The number is "getting fuzzier," said Jim Merzhon, Forest fire spokesman, Tuesday morning. "I didn't know that anyone's really counting."

Aug. 18

Fire management officials are training ground crews as fast as they can find bodies in the Libby area. The Forest Service wants to hire local people to fight fires, but they have to be properly trained and qualified. While fire management officials have been deluged with calls from out-of-work loggers and other equipment operators, the Forest Service needs ground crews.

Aug. 23

A group of 80 Australians is working alongside crews from all over the United States to control the fires that have erupted across the Kootenai. The Australians are performing a wide range of tasks, said group member Greg Mair, who is working out of the Troy South fire camp. "We're spread through the structure," Mair said.

Aug. 25

Level 5 restrictions prohibiting all public access in Lincoln County to state and federal lands except for firefighting were announced Wednesday afternoon by Montana Gov. Marc Racicot. The restrictions might have been enforced sooner in Lincoln, Flathead and Lake counties but federal and state land managers have been too busy fighting fires, Racicot said during a teleconference.

Aug. 30

Charlie Webster couldn't promise the audience Monday the fires in northwest Montana would stop at the tens of thousands of acres they've already scorched. "There's a lot of fuel energy still poised to be released," he said. "I wish I could tell you we don't have a lot of potential out there, but we do," said Webster, the Kootenai National Forest fire management officer. "We have



The former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine was in the news in 2000 after Grace purchased a controlling interest in Kootenai Development Corp., which had bought the property following the closure of the mine in 1990. Grace refused to allow the EPA to dump asbestos-contaminated materials at the site, prompting the agency to file a lawsuit in federal court.

45,000 acres of fire out on the hillside."

Sept. 1

Northern Regional Forester Dale Bosworth visited two Troy-area fire camps as scattered rain and cooler temperatures limited wildfire activity, according to reports. Bosworth, in his first visit since the fires erupted, stopped at Winslow Corner, where hundreds of Army soldiers from North Carolina are camped, and the Troy South Incident Command Post.

Sept. 6

Level 5 restrictions have been dropped to Level 3 on all state and private forested lands as well as the Kootenai National Forest. Rain varying from .25 to .94 inches has fallen across northwest Montana, enough to reduce the risk of new fire starts and people getting trapped by fast-moving, uncontrolled fires.

Sept. 8

Cooler, wetter weather and containment progress on the fires have the suppression efforts winding down. Level 2 fire restrictions will go into effect, placing certain restrictions on campfires and smoking and asking for voluntary use of Hot Owl logging restrictions.

Sept. 13

The federal firefighting effort has boosted county business coffers by more than \$300,000 in the past month. Rope, batteries, Gatorade and myriad other items were purchased locally to fuel the firefighting effort by hundreds of people on the line and in camps.

Sept. 15

A dispute between the Environmental Protection Agency and W.R. Grace over access to Grace-controlled property near Libby appears to be headed for the courts, an EPA official said Wednesday. Grace has agreed to grant access for investigative purposes but not for cleanup or disposal of materials excavated from

private property.

Sept. 20

The Memorial Gym remodeling project wasn't included in \$16 million for Montana projects in a spending measure that passed the Senate Appropriations committee on Sept. 13. Members of the Kootenai Heritage Council had hoped \$1.5 million for the renovation of the aging gym into a cultural arts and exhibition hall would be included in the Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban and Development appropriations bill for the fiscal year 2001.

Sept. 22

Libby's Amtrak train station will be getting a facelift through the work of a joint Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development Council infrastructure committee. Plans call for the station to be pressure washed this weekend and painted the following weekend if the weather permits, said Chamber director Linda Beaulieu.

Sept. 27

Temperatures are falling but the cost of heating oil is on the rise. Locally, the cost of number 2 heating oil stood at about \$1.24 per gallon Monday, up about 20 cents from two months ago and 50 cents from last fall. Gasoline prices had risen to about \$1.66 per gallon, with taxed diesel fuel at \$1.74.

Sept. 29

A decision by Libby City Council to grant a temporary zoning variance to allow an asphalt plant at the former Shed 6 site near the Stimson lumber mill has some neighborhood residents upset. The one-year variance was granted at a special Aug. 14 meeting. Todd Berget, who owns the property along with his brother, Mayor Tony Berget, and their father, had approached city council at its regular meeting the previous week and asked for the variance.

Oct. 4

Libby City Council got an earful from area residents who are angry about a decision to allow an asphalt plant within city limits. More than 50 people attended a hearing on a proposal to rezone the former Shed 6 property where the plant is located from business to industrial.

Oct. 6

Screening appointments for asbestos-related disease will be taken through Oct. 20 and the testing in Libby will end on Nov. 2, says the federal health official in charge. Through Sept. 30, 6,003 people had scheduled appointments for the interview, breathing test and chest X-rays.

Oct. 11

A public meeting with a Montana Department of Environmental Quality expert on asphalt plants has been scheduled by the city of Libby at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 17, in the council chambers at City Hall. Tom Franklin, who handles asphalt plant permits for the state, will be available to discuss issues concerning a new asphalt plant being set up within city limits.

Oct. 15

St. John's Lutheran Hospital will present a proposal to permanently close Fourth Street be-

# Year in Review

Continued from Page 5  
Oct. 27

Construction is planned to begin next spring on a new senior citizens center in Troy with funding to come from a \$427,693 Community Development Block Grant. The grant application received the highest ranking of 15 proposals submitted to the state Commerce Department. Of those 15 proposals, the top 10 received funding.

Nov. 1

Seventy former Libby-area residents, about one for every 83 tested in Libby, went through the screening for asbestos-related diseases in Elko, Nev., last week, according to the Libby screening site coordinator. The people tested in Elko bring the total number of people participating in the screening process to 5,912. Appointments in both areas totaled 6,873.

Nov. 3

Nine to 10 percent of the people from a small sampling in the Libby asbestos medical screening program have been referred for

further evaluation, according to a federal health official. The sampling was based on available statistics for 429 sets of x-rays examined for lung abnormalities or pleural thickening — hardening of the wall of the lung.

Nov. 8

A controversial zoning variance that allowed an asphalt plant to set up on former mill property in city limits was granted improperly and should be set aside, Councilman Dan Stephens said at a Libby City Council meeting. Stephens said he discovered the variance was not handled correctly after reviewing city code.

Nov. 10

Democratic candidate Eileen Carney edged out Republican Don Lewis Tuesday in a tight race to determine the Libby area's representative in the state House of Representatives. Carney picked up 1,495 votes to Lewis's 1,365.

Nov. 15

The Kootenai Heritage Council has contracted a consulting firm specializing in the planning and



Clay Coker



Eileen Carney



Linda Beaulieu



Al Randall



Marlene Palmquist



Max Baucus



Sandra Honeychurch



Tony Berget

development of arts facilities to conduct a feasibility study of a proposal to turn Memorial Gym into a cultural arts center. KHC is proposing a \$2.4 million renovation that would transform the old gymnasium into a 354-seat theater and 6,000-square-foot exhibition hall. KHC has already received a \$900,000 appropriation from the federal government as well as nearly \$100,000 in donations.

Nov. 17

School district financial clerk Mary Brooks recited the oath of office on Tuesday. She replaced Bill Olson, who retired in August and has moved to Washington state. Olson held the job for 19 years.

Nov. 22

Libby City Council voted Monday night to rescind a controversial zoning variance that allowed an asphalt plant within city limits. Council voted to send the issue back to the Board of Adjustments after Councilman Dan Stephens reported that a review of city

code indicated the procedure had been handled improperly.

Nov. 29

The once-charred Green Meadow Manor has been rebuilt in time for the Christmas season. Workers this week are finishing the apartment complex for elderly and people with disabilities. A grand reopening is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 2.

Dec. 1

U.S. Sen. Max Baucus pledged this week to pressure federal agencies to release statistics from recent health screenings and speed up a plan to investigate area homes for asbestos contamination. Close to 7,000 people were screened for possible asbestos-related lung diseases. According to federal health officials, preliminary findings indicate that around 10 percent of those screened may be affected. Actual numbers have not been released publicly.

Dec. 6

Lincoln County library director Marlene Palmquist has resigned

effective Dec. 13, nearly a year and a half after arriving in Libby. Her position will be filled by retired Libby High School librarian Al Randall until a permanent director is hired. Randall was head librarian at Libby High School for 28 years and is now school district grant writer.

Dec. 8

A terrorist bomb blast in Kosovo on the day before Thanksgiving missed its intended target but nearly killed Libby's police chief. Chief Clay Coker, who went to Kosovo in September on a one-year United Nations mission, was patrolling near the Serbian ambassador's house and was knocked flat when the bombing occurred. "It was kind of like getting hit by an invisible car," Coker said.

Dec. 13

Libby Dam operators ramped up releases to full powerhouse discharge by Monday morning in reaction to a level two power emergency for the Pacific Northwest. The emergency was called as a result of weather forecasts calling for bitter sharply colder temperatures from an Arctic front moving through the region.

Dec. 15

Linda Beaulieu submitted her resignation Tuesday as the executive director of the Libby Area Chamber of Commerce. She told the chamber board of directors

she would work through Dec. 31, citing a desire "to pursue other endeavors" as the reason for resigning.

Dec. 20

A recently completed study by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has found the local death rate from asbestosis to be 40 to 60 times higher than state and national averages. ATSDR reviewed local death certificates for a 20-year period from 1979 to 1998 and compared deaths from various causes to state and national averages to come up with ratios of observed to expected deaths.

Dec. 22

A "normal" type of winter is in store for southern Lincoln County, according to the National Weather Service. The snow of late fall — 6 inches since Nov. 9 and 3.5 inches on the ground, as of last Thursday — broke a long spell of relative dryness. Only 3.2 inches of precipitation had been measured from May through October, compared to an 80-year average of 7.23.

Dec. 27

Al Randall is back in the library, heading up the Lincoln County Libraries system. The retired Libby High School librarian was hired Dec. 19 to succeed Marlene Palmquist as director of the county system.

**The Lincoln County Helpline**  
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# Asbestos dominated local news except for 'the rally'

The year 2000 began with dire predictions of massive technological breakdowns, which failed to evolve. In Lincoln County, the news — all year — was dominated by the asbestos contamination from the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

Readers of *The Western News* got a reprieve from the asbestos news when a rally to protest the Clinton administration's agenda for public lands in the West evolved into an anti-government rally of sorts near Libby.

Here's the major stories of the year from the pages of *The Western News*:

**Jan. 5**

A Kalispell man who confessed to bludgeoning an ex-girlfriend to death in July 1999 near Libby was sentenced to 40 years in prison. John Hannan, 51, said he was in a rage over the theft of \$10,000 worth of marijuana when he hit 38-year-

old Katherine Hardesty on the head with a handgun.

**Jan. 7**

Mill owner Jim Hurst of Eureka is hoping to send 10,000 shovels to Elko, Nev., residents angry over Forest Service decision not to rebuild a washed-out road along the Jarbidge River. Shovels will be collected at Payne Machinery in Libby and at other locations around western Montana.

**Jan. 12**

Lincoln County is proposing a wait-and-see approach to returning Memorial Gym to the Libby School District for use as a cultural arts center. County Commissioner Rita Windom has suggested a binding buy-sell agreement that would return the gym to the school only if funding for the project can be secured.

**Jan. 14**

One of the two Las Vegas men whose convictions for the 1995 murder of Brian Carreiro

during a trip to the Trego area were overturned by the Montana Supreme Court has entered a guilty plea in federal court. Larry Pizzichiello has pleaded guilty to robbery and agreed to testify against John Lynch in exchange for the dismissal of additional charges.

**Jan. 19**

A group of Libby residents involved in lawsuits against W.R. Grace told U.S. Sen. Max Baucus Monday to vote against the Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act but asked the senator to support plans for a local asbestos clinic. Baucus visited the home of Gayla Benefield to meet with people concerned about asbestos issues.

**Jan. 21**

Libby police officer Scott Hutchings told City Council Tuesday that he's getting along fine with his new partner, with

See Year in Review on Page 5



Steve McNeil of Bozeman holds the burning United Nations flag at the end of the rally at the state weigh station near Troy on April 15. Although rally organizers cancelled the protest, people showed up from Bozeman, Missoula and northern Idaho. They held an impromptu rally away from Libby.



# Year in Review

Continued from Page 1

the exception of one minor annoyance. "The only issue I have right now is, she sheds," Hutchings said. Hutchings' partner is a German shepherd named Annie who is trained to sniff out marijuana and methamphetamine.

Jan. 26

W. R. Grace has offered to provide funding for asbestosis health screening and the needed equipment at St. John's Lutheran Hospital and to provide health insurance for local residents suffering from asbestos-related ailments. Grace has committed to donate \$250,000 a year for as long as necessary to St. John's Lutheran Hospital to provide health screening to anyone in Libby who wants it, and to provide medical coverage to anyone in Libby who is diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease.

Jan. 28

Cajun James of Eureka - an out-

spoken critic of the federal government and a licensed firearms dealer who once sued the "Freemen" of eastern Montana after they gave him a \$1.4 million bad check - has announced his candidacy for Lincoln County Commissioner. Radical changes are needed to help revive the local resource economy, James said.

Feb. 2

Longtime Libby City Councilman Ed Baker has resigned his post, citing personal reasons including health issues. In a resignation letter dated Jan. 27, Baker told Mayor Tony Berget that his resignation has nothing to do with the job Berget has been doing as mayor.

Feb. 4

At a town meeting Wednesday night at Memorial Gym, officials from the federal Environmental Protection Agency discussed preliminary results from a round of indoor air testing for asbestos and answered questions from an audience that included Gov. Marc Racicot, U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns and an aide to U.S. Rep. Rick Hill. Samples show elevated levels of asbestos at two sites formerly owned by W.R. Grace and at two of the 32 Libby area homes tested.

Feb. 9

A conservation group is threatening to sue Sterling Mining Co. for water pollution at the company's recently acquired Troy Mine. The company's failure to get a pollution-elimination permit to operate the mothballed mine violates the Clean Water Act, according to Cabinet Resource Group of Heron.

Feb. 11

The city of Troy's police committee will be considering a mutual aid agreement with the Lincoln County

Sheriff's Office as financial and legal protection for the three-man city police force. Currently the city and county have no cooperative agreement for city officers to either respond to a crime or accident or back up a deputy at a scene outside the city limits.

Feb. 16

Republican congressional candidate Dennis Rehberg discussed issues ranging from asbestos to veterans' benefits with about 30 Libby residents at a Feb. 10 town meeting at the Libby VFW hall. Rehberg is running for the House seat currently held by Rick Hill. Hill is not seeking a third term because of recurring complications from eye surgery.

Feb. 18

More than \$4 million is available to begin health screenings for the Libby community, but the total costs and final plans for asbestos cleanup and healthcare won't be known until mid summer, federal officials testified during a Senate field hearing Wednesday at Memorial Gym. U.S. Sen. Max Baucus orchestrated the local hearing of the Senate subcommittee on Environment and Public Works.

Feb. 28

Four people have applied to fill the Libby City Council seat vacated by Ed Baker's resignation last month. D.C. Orr, Dan Taasevigen, Stuart Crismore and Etta Doubek have submitted letters of interest. Council will continue accepting applicants through the end of February.

Feb. 25

For the first time in 21 winters, DJ is not among the grizzly bears in dens in the Yaak, but information gained by studying DJ and her offspring is still helping scientists. DJ and two cubs were found dead in June 1999, apparently killed by another grizzly.

March 1

Happier times have taken over for

staff at Lincoln County Campus, faculty members told the campus board Tuesday night. Recently the college had been burdened by instability in the director position and a funding dispute with its parent, Flathead Valley Community College.

March 3

Declining timber harvests coupled with budget cutbacks are forcing the Kootenai National Forest to consider the elimination of perhaps 20 to 30 positions, forest supervisor Bob Castaneda told the Lincoln County Commissioners Wednesday. Faced with a \$2.5 million cut to its budget of approximately \$20 million, the Kootenai is in the process of reorganizing, Castaneda said.

March 8

Libby City Council appointed Ken Sorensen Monday to fill a vacancy created by the recent resignation of longtime councilman Ed Baker. Seven people applied for the position - Sorensen, D.C. Orr, Dan Taasevigen, Stuart Crismore, Etta Doubek, Bob Parker and Don Rogers.

March 10

An advertisement in Sunday's Portland Oregonian newspaper spotlighting Libby as a great place to live and do business is showing signs of paying off. Placed by Timberline Auto Center owner Terry Andreessen, the large, eye-catching ad features a picture of Libby's Jack Housel with the record rainbow trout he caught below Libby Dam as well as information on the area's other benefits. Ten business owners and one individual looking to move had answered the ad by Wednesday.

March 15

A rally protesting what its organizers are calling "the Clinton environmental regime's war on the West" is planned for Saturday, April 15, in Libby. The brainchild of Terry Andreessen, Scott and D.C. Orr, Jim Rathbun, Doug Griffiths

and Jerry Diemert, the event is intended to call attention to the negative effects federal lands policies have had on the rural West.

March 17

A Wolf Point educator has been selected as the new principal of Libby High School beginning next fall. Elaine Forrest, principal of Wolf Point High School, has accepted the position. Her appointment needs only the Libby school board approval.

March 22

Results of a recent round of testing of soil, dust and insulation samples from area homes do not show levels of asbestos that the Environmental Protection Agency believes need immediate action. The test results will be discussed at a public meeting in Memorial Gym.

March 24

An \$11.5 million emergency appropriation to help Libby deal with problems associated with asbestos exposure from a former vermiculite mine has been added to a Senate appropriations bill, U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns has announced. Burns said he has requested \$3.5 million for the local hospital and an additional \$8 million that would go to the city for other asbestos-related health, environmental and economic mitigation needs.

March 29

With the exception of some former W.R. Grace facility sites, there appears to be little evidence of risk in living in Libby today, said members of the federal team investigating asbestos contamination. That doesn't preclude the need to continue testing homes and businesses in the community and follow through with ambient air and area soil testing during drier conditions, said Paul Peronard of the Environmental Protection Agency.

March 31

Local officials are hoping for the best but preparing for the worst planning for an April 15 rally protesting the Clinton administration's "War on the West." "You're either very optimistic about the event or you're very pessimistic about there's no in-between," U.S. Forest Service employee Jeff Scussel said during a meeting attended by about 30 people representing city and county government, local law enforcement and emergency services such as ambulance and search and rescue.

See Year in Review on Page 2



# Year in Review

Continued from Page 4

April 5

Organizers have canceled an April 15 protest rally following widespread concerns that the gathering would attract a variety of extremists and lead to violence. The event was to have featured the burning of a United Nations flag and copies of income tax forms, according to an advertising flier calling for "forceful civil disobedience." Organizer Terry Andreessen said he doesn't think many extreme groups planned to participate, but extremists from the other end of the political spectrum may have intended to protest the event.

April 7

Three interviews have been scheduled with candidates to replace retiring Asa Wood principal Shirley Chase, said officials of Libby School District. One of the candidates, Sandra Honeychurch, is currently a teacher at Libby Middle School. The others are Rosie Comes of Great Falls and Jackie O'Brien of Trout Creek.

April 12

Dr. Phillip Alford announced Friday that he will be leaving Libby at the end of April to accept an appointment in the surgical program at the Texas Tech University School of Medicine in Lubbock. Dr. Lance Breanbrack, a board certified general surgeon has been hired to replace Alford, who came to Libby almost two years ago.

April 14

Local law enforcement officers are on the alert following reports that anti-government activists from around the Northwest plan to demonstrate in Libby Saturday despite official cancellation of an organized rally. "There will be people showing up, there's no doubt about that," Lincoln County Sheriff Daryl

how many."

April 19

A rally against the federal government's intrusion into the lives of Westerners fizzled in the drizzle in the parking lot of a state weigh station 16 miles west of Libby. Fewer than 50 protesters mingled in light rain with more than a dozen members of the media. Local supporters of the rally vented their anger at Libby City Council for what they saw as the city's role in exerting pressure on organizers to call off the event and expressed concerns that communist agitators also played a part.

April 21

Jackie O'Brien of Trout Creek has agreed to be the new principal of Asa Wood Elementary School. The Libby School District offered her the job last week after the board interviewed her and two other candidates.

April 26

A community medical trust is being proposed by St. John's Lutheran Hospital to provide care for victims of asbestos exposure that may not be covered in a health plan offered by former mine owner W.R. Grace. "The Grace plan is a good start," St. John's chief executive officer Rick Palagi said. "But there are some needs that people may have that will not be covered by that plan."

April 28

Spilling water at Libby Dam might help endangered sturgeon but kill threatened bull trout and put more wear on the 26-year-old dam, say officials of three government agencies. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is looking for more flow volume for downstream sturgeon, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is fearing for bull trout and the federal dam manager is con-

May 3

A federal jury in Missoula deliberated about 8½ hours Friday before finding John Lynch not guilty of murder but guilty of robbery and use of a firearm during a crime of violence in connection with the 1995 death of Brian Carreiro in Lincoln County. Lynch and Larry Pizzichiello had both been sentenced to life in prison for the crime, but their convictions were overturned by the Montana Supreme Court. Pizzichiello pleaded guilty in federal court to robbery and was sentenced to 12½ years in prison.

May 5

John Herrmann received 304 votes to Deborah Stokesberry's 276 in the only contested race in Libby Schools' trustee election. Stokesberry had served six months on the board after being appointed in November to replace Bill Mann, who had resigned with one year left in his term.

May 10

Libby got an initial nod from the Senate appropriations committee this week on \$11.5 million in economic development and medical funding. The committee passed an amendment approving U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns' request for the money to help Libby deal with problems associated with asbestos exposure from a former vermiculite mine near Libby.

May 12

A proposal to pave and widen the Thompson River Road would hurt the local economy by encouraging tourists to bypass Lincoln County, community leaders told a federal highway engineer Wednesday. An environmental review will take three to five years, and the actual work on the 42-mile road linking Montana Highway 200 with U

15 years, a federal engineer said.

May 17

Voters in the western part of the county could be determining the fate of Troy Dispatch when they go to the polls on June 6. Residents of the 295 telephone calling area will be asked to increase their property taxes by 13 mills to fund the service.

May 19

Students planted a Ponderosa pine seedling outside Libby Middle School in memory of late teacher Maria Marozzo, who died of a pulmonary embolism on Dec. 25, 1999. She was 50 years old.

May 24

Local government representatives are hoping that recent action by the Legislature during a special session will ease budget shortfalls created in the past. House Bill 4 reduced property tax and gave an additional \$20.3 million in state aid to schools.

May 26

A proposed conservation easement on 140,000 acres of Plum Creek Timber Co. land in the Fisher and Thompson river drainages is moving ahead with an environmental assessment slated for release in August. The proposed agreement with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks would result in Plum Creek surrendering development rights to the property.

May 31

A free health insurance program offered by W.R. Grace to Libby-area residents suffering from asbestos-related illnesses has been revised for a second time, but the plan doesn't please everyone in the local medical community. The plan is still too restricting, county health officer Brad Black said during a meeting of Libby's Community Ad-

visory Group on asbestos issues.

ferred by W.R. Grace to victims of asbestos-related disease received more criticism this week, this time from U.S. Sen. Max Baucus. At a meeting in Libby, Baucus accused the company of "stonewalling" and not making good on its pledge to be responsible for the medical bills of people injured by their exposure to asbestos associated with Grace's former vermiculite mine.

June 7

A 20-year-old Troy man was killed in a canoeing accident on Lake Creek. Adam Seifert and a friend were in a canoe that struck a root wad and capsized, pinning Seifert between the canoe and the root wad.

June 9

Kalispell-based Semitool Inc. has announced plans to open a manufacturing plant in Libby this summer, putting 25 to 30 people to work within the next few weeks and possibly two to three times that many by the end of the summer. The company builds equipment used in the manufacture of semiconductors for computers.

June 14

Three local Reform Party candidates are challenging Rick Maedje's recent victory in the Republican primary for county commissioner on the grounds that Maedje may not have lived in Lincoln County for the necessary two years. Cajun James, Virginia Emerson and Jerome Johnson filed a contest of nomination Monday in District Court.

June 16

Troy Mayor Rod Johnson has announced his resignation effective July 12. Johnson, who was appointed in December following

the resignation of Mayor Barbara Anderson, said his full-time job with Sterling Mining Co. did not leave him enough time to adequately take care of city business.

June 21

Chief Clay Coker of the Libby Police Department will be heading to Kosovo to take part in an international police mission following approval by the city council Monday night. Coker will join officers from around the world in training local police in Kosovo.

June 23

A half-dozen log trucks, one loaded with logs, led the way as about 15 Missoula-bound vehicles left the parking lot of Libby High School Wednesday morning. Along with hundreds of other vehicles from around the region, they were headed to a rally dubbed "CARE" for Communities Against Roadless Expansion.

June 28

Libby City Council on June 19 voted to trade city property behind Nelson & Vial Funeral Home to Niles Nelson in exchange for a similarly sized parcel at the corner of Larch Street and Utah Avenue. The city plans to use its new property for a park. Nelson will use the newly acquired parcel for parking.

June 30

An investigation into past decisions about asbestos hazards associated with W.R. Grace's former vermiculite mine in Libby is being called for by three high-ranking Environmental Protection Agency officials. The officials said decisions made by EPA and other federal agencies need to be reconstructed by an impartial entity.



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers

about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

Western News  
12/37/00

**Q: I recently participated in the asbestos medical testing in Libby. What is the status of the reports from these tests?**

**A:** The results of your x-ray reviews, lung function test, and health interview are combined into one report. When you receive the report, you may wish to review your results with your personal physician. If your tests show any abnormalities, your physician may suggest that you undergo additional testing to further evaluate your health before making recommendations for your personal health care.

- ✓ As of December 15th, 750 test results report letters had been mailed to ATSDR medical testing program participants. ATSDR expects to send out 250 more results letters by the end of December
- ✓ ATSDR has begun a preliminary analysis of the test results for the first 1,000 participants in the testing program. ATSDR expects to present a summary of this analysis at a community Advisory Group meeting in February, 2001.

For more information, call:

ATSDR, Dan Strausbaugh at 406-293-2728

# County plans meeting on lawsuit

## Public meeting to discuss suit against Grace, applying for federal clinic

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

Lincoln County officials are planning a public meeting for mid-January to discuss a possible lawsuit against W.R. Grace and a proposal to apply for a federally funded clinic to provide low-cost community health care.

The meeting is planned for the evening of Wednesday, Jan. 17, but a time and place remain to be set.

Commissioners Rita Windom and John Konzen, along with County Attorney

Bernie Cassidy, met with attorneys from Helena and California Friday to discuss legal strategies for funding a medical trust that would pay for health care for area residents with asbestos-related diseases. A lawsuit against W.R. Grace, which owned the mine that produced asbestos-tainted vermiculite, is a possibility. A subcommittee of the Libby Community Advisory Group is working on a health plan that proponents say will be better than a free plan offered by W.R. Grace, but a source of money for the trust needs to be secured.

One of the attorneys in Libby last week is the city attorney for Lodi, Calif., Windom said. He shared information on Lodi's litigation against a number of polluters that contaminated the city's groundwater.

"The important thing that I got out of the discussion was that it was new legal turf, and they went through all the steps and won at every level," Windom said.

Lodi used the money it won in court to

See **Lawsuit** on Page 6

## Lawsuit

Continued from Page 1  
cover cleanup costs, Windom said. Groundwork laid in the Lodi case could provide guidance for Lincoln County if it decides to sue Grace, she said.

The second issue to be discussed at the meeting is a proposal to apply for a federally funded clinic to provide low-cost healthcare. The proposal grew out of studies showing that many Lincoln County residents are medically uninsured or underinsured.

The clinic would provide general health care for the community and

would not be focused on asbestos-related diseases. The clinic would be open to the public, and a sliding fee scale would be established with a minimum fee of \$5, Windom said.

"Everyone would have to pay something," she said.

Mary Beth Frideres of the Montana Primary Care Association is providing guidance on the clinic proposal.

"There's a lot of devil in the details," Windom said. "We're just in the concept stage right now."

Western News  
Dec. 20, 2000

# Asbestos death rate 40-60 percent higher locally

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

A recently completed study by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has found the local death rate from asbestosis to be 40 to 60 times higher than state and national averages.

ATSDR epidemiologist Steve Dearwent discussed the study at a Dec. 14 meeting of the Libby Community Advisory Group.

ATSDR reviewed local death certificates for a 20-year period from 1979 to 1998. Deaths from various causes were compared to state and national averages to come up with standardized mortality ratios — ratios of observed to expected deaths.

The study looked at asbestos-related dis-

eases including asbestosis, cancers of the lung and digestive tract, and diseases of pulmonary circulation. ATSDR also compiled statistics on several diseases that are not related to asbestos exposure.

The standardized mortality ratios for all causes of death except asbestosis hovered around 1, while the SMR for asbestosis shot to about 40 when using the state average and 60 when using the national average.

Dearwent said he was "taken aback" by those numbers.

"As an epidemiologist, I'm used to seeing SMRs that are maybe 2 or 3," he said.

The study area covered a 10-mile radius around Libby. During the 20-year period

under investigation, the death certificates of 11 people listed asbestosis as an underlying cause of death. Of those, 10 were men and one was a woman.

The death certificates did not provide any information on a person's occupational history or historical exposure to asbestos, Dearwent said.

The study was criticized by several people at the CAG meeting because it used only death certificates and did not delve into the medical histories of people who may have suffered from asbestosis but died of an unrelated malady. Several people told Dearwent they knew of people who had suffered from asbestosis but died of something else according to their death certi-

cates.

Dearwent said he understood that asbestosis may have been underreported as a cause of death, but if the study had looked into the medical histories of people who died in Libby it would have had to do the same for everyone who died in Montana or the entire United States to make a valid comparison.

"In a death certificate, there are limitations but there are also consistencies that make for a very valid comparison between communities," he said.

The study also found four local deaths from mesothelioma, a rare form of lung cancer caused by exposure to asbestos.

See **Mortality rate** on Page 7

## Mortality rate —

Continued from Page 1

Because the disease is so rare, no comparison was made to state or national averages. One or two mesothelioma deaths per one million people might be expected, Dearwent said.

The ATSDR study is available for public review at the Lincoln County Library in Libby, at the ATSDR office at 501 Mineral Ave., and at the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department in the courthouse annex.

WESTERN NEWS Dec 20, 2000

## A different road

It would have been more reassuring if W.R. Grace had established a trust to fund its free medical coverage for Libby asbestos victims.

While the plan is far from perfect, points of contention might be negotiable to change. The major concern of local medical people and asbestos victims has been Grace's own financial health for the long term. The medical plan is only as good as long as Grace is in business.

Lincoln County Commissioners are now mulling over the possibility of a suit against the multinational chemical giant to create a community medical trust to cover long-term health needs.

The idea won't sit well with many people, mostly those who have chosen not to take part in the past year's discussions and decisions on the asbestos problem. Think about it carefully. As should the county officials who will ultimately have to make this decision.

While Grace appeared darn near invincible a year ago, their stock has been on a steep downward trend. A graph charting the company's stock rates looks more like a profile of a ski run at Turner Mountain. Grace stock hit a high in 2000 of \$15.13 a share on Jan. 10. The low was Dec. 8 at \$1.25. Presently, Grace stock is sitting at \$1.94.

It should also be pointed out that revenues in the company, for the first 9 months were up 5 percent to \$1.18 billion while revenues from continuing operations rose 13 percent to \$92.9 million. The first revenue number reflects acquisitions while the second shows improvements.

Like everything else in today's economy, it shows mixed signals. It's easy to understand why many people don't believe Grace will be around to fund their insurance plan.

Others have a deep-rooted distrust for the company based on personal dealings as victims or family members of victims from the local asbestos contamination. And still others simply distrust corporations.

It's hard to consider finances, economies and related matters when we're talking about the health of so many local people but the biggest problem facing this community is being able to provide adequate health care. If we don't find a way to help asbestos victims, the toll on the local health care system will be enormous.

The toll on the future economy of the area may already have been decided with the year of national and regional publicity. We could be hard pressed to entice companies of this size to come in here and engage in mining or other activities which have to be monitored to protect the environment or human health.

This could be good or bad depending on your perspective. Regardless, it will be a significant change from the economy of the past.

The commissioners decision to sue or not sue will also play a role that could be setting the community down a different economic road. That's why the commissioners need to engage in significant community discussion, perhaps an evening public meeting.

We need to embark on an effort to provide medical care for our community members with eyes open so there are no surprises in the future. First we need community-wide participation, something that hasn't occurred on this issue during the past year. — Roger Morris

# County considers suing Grace

By BRENT SHRUM  
Western News Reporter

Lincoln County officials are looking at possible litigation to pay for a proposed medical trust that would fund health care for area residents with asbestos-related diseases.

The county commissioners and county attorney met last Friday with attorneys from Helena and California to share information, according to Commissioner Rita Windom.

"They just gave us information about environmental issues that they had seen in other areas, and how they were similar or dissimilar to what we have, and discussed some possible solutions,"

Windom said.

Those possible solutions included litigation strategies that could fund a medical trust, she said.

No decision has been made to retain any attorneys, Windom said. The issue is scheduled for further discussion at the commissioners' meetings on Dec. 20 in Eureka and Jan. 3 in Libby.

A subcommittee of the Libby Community Advisory Group is working on a health plan that proponents say will be better than the free plan offered by W.R. Grace. The plan would be funded by a trust, but a source of money for the trust needs to be secured.

A serious shortcoming of the Grace plan is a person must have an asbestos-related problem in both lungs to qualify, Windom said.

"That's the real big problem," she said. "There's a lot of people who just have it in one lung."

People who are uninsured and have an asbestos-related problem in one lung will be unable to get insurance, Windom said.

"I'm telling them to go ahead and file (for the Grace plan) so you can be rejected and then you'll have the paper trail that we can use at a later date," she said.

See Commissioners on Page 7

"We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg now."

Rita Windom  
Commissioner

## Commissioners

Continued from Page 1

The community's asbestos-related health problems are sure to get worse over the next decade, Windom said.

"There's a need here," she said. "We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg now."

Windom said she has been sur-

prised by the number of people turning up with asbestos-related diseases following a community health screening.

"I thought it was way out of proportion when I first heard it," she said. "I never would have believed it, but I do now."

# EPA planning new round of tests

The Environmental Protection Agency is planning a round of tests at area homes to find out how people might be exposed to asbestos while engaged in everyday activities around the house.

Scheduled to start in mid-February, the tests will include the placement of personal air sampling pumps on people as they go about their daily routine in the home.

Earlier testing in Libby-area homes involved the use of stationary sampling pumps that were placed in the living area to monitor indoor air. About a third of the homes that were tested showed the presence of some asbestos fibers of varying size and number.

The new round of tests is designed to compare the results obtained using stationary air monitors with the results from monitors placed on people engaged in routine or special activities in the home.

Participation in the testing program will be voluntary, and the addresses of the participants will not be made

public. The program will cover routine household activities, active house cleaning, simulated remodeling activities and garden tilling.

Eight houses that were previously sampled will be picked for testing during routine household activities. The sampling team will come to the home shortly after the resident arises in the morning and begin monitoring with both personal and stationary pumps.

Monitoring will continue until the end of the day. During the sampling period, the participant will be required to remain indoors and refrain from sweeping or dusting.

The remaining three aspects of the new sampling program will involve the use of EPA staff or consultants wearing protective gear. To simulate possible exposure from house cleaning, someone wearing an air monitor will perform two hours of cleaning activities such as sweeping, vacuuming and dusting in the same eight homes tested during routine household activities.

Tests to simulate exposure during the remodeling of a house will take place at one house with insulation not believed to contain asbestos and at three houses where the insulation is vermiculite known to contain at least 0.5 percent asbestos. Activities will be aimed at simulating the things a homeowner might do that could lead to direct exposure to vermiculite insulation. Examples include the removal of insulation from a wall or ceiling and moving insulation to gain access to plumbing or wiring.

Three properties will be selected for testing during garden-tilling activities. One property will be picked where the garden does not contain visible vermiculite and where tests do not reveal the presence of asbestos, and two will be picked where vermiculite is visible and/or soil analysis reveals the presence of asbestos fibers. Stationary monitors will sample the air 5 meters upwind and 5 meters downwind of the garden, and the person tilling the garden will wear a personal sampling pump.

MONTANIAN

DEC 20, 2000



## ASK EPA!!

### Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: Will the Community Advisory Group have regular meetings again?**

**A:** Yes, at the December 14 CAG meeting, the group expressed interest in resuming meetings twice per month. The meetings will be held on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room of Libby's City Hall. The next meeting will be held on January 11, 2001.

The summaries of the meetings are posted on EPA's web page along with other information about the asbestos investigation and cleanup in Libby. Please take a look at the site at [www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/libby](http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/libby).

For more information about the Community Advisory Group, call

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator, at 406-441-1150 x241

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# Wilkins wants criminal charges filed against Grace

By LYNETTE HINTZE

Special to the News

Don Wilkins doesn't mince words about W.R. Grace: He wants the company to face criminal charges for knowingly poisoning Libby vermiculite mine workers and their families with toxic asbestos fibers.

"My main emphasis is that charges be filed against Grace," Wilkins said. "Someone should be held accountable in a criminal court of law."

Wilkins, a Stimson Lumber Co. employee, never worked at the vermiculite mine, but his father, Bob Wilkins, worked there for 25 years and now has asbestosis.

Bob Wilkins, who was president of a union local at the mine, has documents he believes show how Grace officials in the early 1980s managed to shut down a study that would have brought the miners' abnormal lung X-rays to the forefront nationally.

"People don't realize the influence W.R. Grace has," Bob said. "They stopped the investigation just like

that."

Daniel Banks, a doctor with the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, contacted union officials at the Libby mine in 1980, after the federal agency learned that 11 employees from the Scott's lawn fertilizer company had been diagnosed with asbestosis. Scott's was one of Grace's biggest customers, and its vermiculite-based fertilizer came from Libby vermiculite ore.

"Banks asked me if the union membership would cooperate with a study," Bob recalled. "He said they'd bring in a lab on location with five technicians."

The study was abruptly shut down, however, and Banks was transferred to another job. Banks later denied ever having talked to Bob Wilkins.

A Grace attorney wrote to the Mine Safety and Health Administration to explain why the company felt the study wasn't needed.

"...the worker exposure to asbesti-

form tremolite contamination from the inception of mining at Libby until the mid-1970s was so high in relation to the present standard as to completely mask and make practically impossible any attempt to measure exposures to vermiculite itself," attorney Mario Favorito wrote.

"Since the mid-1970s, few additions have been made to the Libby worker population. Thus, utilization of Libby as a focus to study exposure to vermiculite would be a wasteful and redundant expenditure of scarce government manpower, money and effort, since it would only verify that excess asbestos-fiber exposure results in adverse health effects."

Don Wilkins points out that J. Peter Grace, owner and president of the corporation at the time, was assigned by President Ronald Reagan to develop ideas on how to cut government spending and streamline agencies. That was the "out" the government needed to cut the Libby study.

Grace's government cost-cutting effort became known as the Grace Commission.

"I don't know how the biggest polluter of communities and lives could have gotten a better deal from a sitting president," Don Wilkins said.

He has asked Montana's congressional delegation to investigate the Grace Commission but has had no response.

"I think they're stalling, because it will be an embarrassment to the Republican party," he said. "I want hearings based on what happened in the '80s."

Bob believes there's enough other documentation to show that the company officials clearly knew there were health problems in the mid-1950s, when Zonolite owned the mine. Grace took over the mine in 1963 and operated it until it closed in 1990.

Wilkins has taken his case to state officials, but he figures he'll have to

start from scratch when a new administration takes office in January.

"The scary thing about W.R. Grace is they have no conscience," he said. "We've seen how they fight the EPA. People are naïve on how the system works. Grace won't pay for the cleanup; the taxpayers will."

Alan Stringer, Grace's representative in Libby, has a different opinion, of course. He feels the company is

doing all it can to help pay victims' medical expenses and make sure contamination is eliminated.

"I've not personally seen anger against me," Stringer said. "People have been polite and friendly. They're concerned, and they need answers."

He acknowledged, though, that there have been harsh words for Grace at some Community Advisory Group meetings.

# ATSDR shares mortality study results at CAG

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will release information from its study of local asbestos-related deaths at the Community Advisory Group meeting at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 14, in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall.

ATSDR is a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The agency prepared a mortality review to identify deaths potentially associated with asbestos exposure in Libby.

In preparing the report, ATSDR reviewed all death certificates for Libby residents who died between 1979 and 1998 and compared the number of deaths from asbestos-related causes to similar deaths across Montana and the United States.

The mortality review will also be available for public review at the Lincoln County Library in Libby, at the ATSDR office at 501 Mineral Ave., and at the Lincoln County Health Department in the county annex at 418 Mineral Ave.

Community members with questions about the review or who would like to receive a copy may contact ATSDR epidemiologist Steve Dearwent at 1-888-42-ATSDR. Callers should refer to the "Libby, Montana site." ATSDR regional representative Dan Strasbaugh in Helena may also be called at (406) 444-2959 for additional information.

More information about asbestos and health effects related to exposure may be found at the ATSDR web site, [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov). For an overview of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project, go to [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEWS/libbymt.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEWS/libbymt.html).

According to a recent report by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Lincoln County ranks second on a list of the top 10 U.S. counties for death rates from asbestosis. NIOSH, which regularly tracks asbestosis mortality rates, reported in its latest update that only Somerset County, N.J., had more asbestos deaths per capita than Lincoln County from 1968-1997. The data was compiled from the National Center for Health Statistics.

Asbestosis is the scarring of lung tissue from inhalation of needle-like asbestos fibers. The disease's effects range from mild impairment to disability and eventually death. Libby's asbestosis deaths are linked to the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

Somerset County, where the Johns-Manville Co.

■ **Libby man  
wants criminal  
charges filed**

See Page 5

■ **Young logger  
diagnosed**

See Page 5

## Mortality

Continued from Page 1  
manufactured asbestos insulation, had 447 asbestos deaths during the 31-year period. Lincoln County, with a much smaller population, had 23 documented deaths from asbestosis.

Somerset's asbestosis death rate was 8.8 per 100,000 people, while Lincoln County's was 5.7 per 100,000 people. That compares to the overall U.S. rate of 0.29 per 100,000 people.

Other areas with high asbestosis mortality rates included Sagadahoc County in Maine, Jackson County in Mississippi and Orange County in Texas, all of which had ship-building operations that used high amounts of asbestos.

See **Mortality** on Page 6

Continued from Page 1  
to do a lot of stuff that we couldn't afford."

"I was looking for a positive somewhere. 'Applaud' just kind of had that ring to it."

Most of the asbestos within district buildings is of the chrysotile variety, less harmful than the tremolite, which Maki said is sealed inside some of the building walls. Tremolite asbestos is found in the vermiculite once mined near Libby.

In two school buildings—Plummer Elementary and Libby Middle schools—the asbestos presence is "minimal," he said.

The compliance turnaround followed a complaint phoned in to the Montana Department of

Environmental Quality on May 12, according to state air quality specialist John Podolinsky.

The man was concerned that replacement of a draft reducer—a fan that forces exhaust gases out the boiler smokestack—in December 1999 at McGrade Elementary School may have caused an exposure. Some asbestos-containing material was disturbed to replace the worn-out reducer, Podolinsky said.

Podolinsky visited the boiler room in September and found the debris had been thoroughly cleaned up.

"It's hard to measure how much was removed or disturbed," he said. "It would've been hard to tell if there was an exposure. If the material did contain asbestos, the asbestos fibers

are gone. They dissipate."

The department took no action, he said.

Podolinsky said like in many a boiler room asbestos could present problems if disturbed. Most school districts can't afford a safe removal, and often removing it is more dangerous than leaving it in place, he said.

The other complaint the caller lodged was a suspicion that the schools' three-year inspection of asbestos-containing materials wasn't done properly, Podolinsky said. That falls under the AHERA law, so the state sent it to EPA.

Since spring, 34 school district employees have been trained in asbestos awareness. Seven maintenance people and the head custodial staff took 16 hours in April and the rest of the staff along with some of the 16-hour trainees, took a two-hour course and attended a two-hour safety training meeting.

The awareness training covered an analysis of the mineral, how it gets into buildings, what it can do to human health, and how to control and dispose of it with protective equipment, Maki said.

Districtwide, staff are well aware of the asbestos situation in their buildings, he said. "Principal happens in, ask him some questions. Put him on the spot."

Other actions that helped meet AHERA were completing the twice-a-year surveillance for asbestos-containing materials and placing an updated copy of the district's management plan, which includes asbestos response information, in the Libby High School administrative office, according to Maki's Nov. 6 letter to the EPA.

The other school buildings have a copy, he said. The high school's was missing on the date of the federal inspection, Maki said.

All asbestos in district buildings is under control, he said.

"Everything is either sealed, monitored or encapsulated, so we're in fairly good shape as far as the district is concerned," he said.

"What I feel good about at this point is we've addressed these issues. We're on the right track. Our training program is set up. We're doing fine there."

## Schools prepared says EPA

■ District applauded on being prepared to handle various asbestos materials

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is applauding Libby School District's success at equipping itself to handle asbestos hazards in its buildings. The kudos came after the state informed the school district of a complaint.

An EPA letter, postmarked Nov. 27, tells the district its training efforts have brought it into compliance with the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986.

"EPA applauds the School District's efforts to comply with AHERA," said Regional Asbestos Coordinator Robert Vick in the letter. "These continued actions will protect the health of your students and employees by preventing their exposure to airborne asbestos fibers."

The compliment had an invigorating effect on District Superintendent Kirby Maki.

"I was tickled, really tickled," he said. "Because he could've given us a directive

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WESTERN NEWS



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: My home has vermiculite insulation in it.  
Will EPA ever be able to tell me whether my home  
is safe to live in?**

**A:** EPA is working with other federal agencies and scientists to evaluate the safety of vermiculite. The Agency uses a risk assessment to estimate the risk of living in or being in a certain situation.

EPA's goals with regard to this are:

1. to determine whether amphibole (tremolite asbestos) fibers are more toxic than serpentine (chrysotile asbestos) fibers.
2. to analyze human and animal study data on asbestos-related illnesses to determine whether EPA can develop a model that helps predict the risk of developing cancer from exposure to tremolite asbestos.
3. to have an open forum for scientists of various backgrounds to review the theory and model.

Dr. Chris Weis and Dr. Aubrey Miller will be in Libby on Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 13, 14. They will be happy to meet with you and discuss the status of the risk assessment or other questions and concerns you may have. Please call the EPA Information Center at 293-6194 to make an appointment.

For more information, call

Dr. Chris Weis, Science Coordinator, 303-312-6671

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator, 406-441-1150 x241.

# County ranks second for asbestosis death

By LYNNETTE HINTZE

Special to the News

Lincoln County ranks second on a list of the top 10 U.S. counties for death rates from asbestosis, a federal study shows.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health regularly tracks asbestosis mortality rates, and discovered during its latest update that only Somerset County, N.J., had more asbestos deaths per capita than Lincoln County from 1968-1997. The data was compiled from the National Center for Health Statistics.

Asbestosis is the scarring of lung tissue from inhalation of needle-like asbestos fibers. The disease's effects range from mild impairment to disability and eventually death. Libby's asbestosis deaths are linked to the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

The raw numbers are somewhat misleading. Heavily populated Somerset County, where the Johns-Manville Co. manufactured asbestos insulation, had 447 asbestos deaths during the 31-year period. Sparsely populated Lincoln County, on the other hand, had only 23 documented deaths from asbestosis.

## Study results

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will share asbestosis death rate statistics at the Dec. 14 Community Advisory Group meeting in Libby.

ATSDR has been studying the death rate in Libby analyzing death certificates filed with the state vital statistic bureau.

The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall.

See **Asbestosis** on Page 6

## Asbestosis

Continued from Page 1

But the rates of death for the two counties paint a bleak picture indeed: Somerset's asbesto-

sis death rate was 8.8 per 100,000 people, while Lincoln County's was 5.7 per 100,000 people. That compares to the overall U.S. rate of just 0.29 per 100,000 people.

The numbers include any deaths with the underlying or contributing cause of death coded as asbestosis.

Other areas with high asbestosis mortality rates included Sagadahoc County in Maine, Jackson County in Mississippi and Orange County in Texas, all of which had ship-building operations that used high amounts of asbestos.

"In some cases these counties pop up with high rates and we don't know exactly why," said Frank Hearl, deputy director of the agency's Division of Respiratory Disease Studies. "It's there along with a lot of other information."

The data is the impetus for the agency to study environmental factors that contribute to asbestos disease, he said.

Currently, the agency is planning new research to help determine the distribution and concentration of asbestos contamination in vermiculite produced by various mines and used in various occupational settings.

Through sampling, federal health workers can better define the extent of potential occupational exposure, Hearl said.

The agency has been involved in asbestos research in Libby for the past two decades. In the 1980s the agency conducted a study about job-related exposure and health effects among workers employed at the Libby mine, and shared those findings with workers and W.R. Grace.

Grace closed the mine in 1990. *Lynnette Hintze is a reporter for the Kalispell Daily Inter Lake.*

## Project 56 critical of editorial broadside on EPA issue

To the Editor:

Mr. Roger Morris has most of the ink in this county, but unfortunately he abuses that privilege, by using a poor patterned load for his editorial shotgun. His shot load scatters and is not in the least accurate. We refer to his editorial dated Oct. 27.

He states, "It's disingenuous of Project 56 to bring their anti-federal government agenda to this issue without regularly attending the Citi-

zens Advisory Group meetings and participating in the discussion. The only thing they can accomplish with this type of rhetoric is delaying the clean up efforts and extending the period of time that residents of this area are exposed to harmful materials."

Mr. Morris missed the clay bird. Our views on the federal government were printed in his paper back in April. We have no problem with our

form of government. It is the greatest in the world, past, present and future. It is certain administrations and non-elected bureaucrats who usurp our rights with whom we differ.

You use the term "constitutionalists" as a dirty word. We are proud to be "constitutionalists." As for the city council having illegal meetings, it is our view that the new city attorney is attempting to keep the council on the straight and narrow. If they

take his advice the matter will become mute.

We don't mind your taking pot shots at us, but go back to the loading bench and develop a more accurate load. You have a very good and powerful shotgun at your disposal, but it takes good ammunition and constant practice to become a good shot.

**Ken Short**  
Vice-Chair Project 56

## Who are we?

To the Editor:

We have received many inquiries from citizens wondering just what Project 56 is all about. We decided the easiest way to inform Lincoln County residents was to print our mission statement and other thoughts in the local papers.

**Mission Statement:** To promote the moral, physical, educational and economic well being of Lincoln County and the people living here by utilizing our natural resources through the empowerment of the Lincoln County Government.

We support God, the United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, limited federal government (republicanism), free enterprise system (capitalism) and home rule (local self-government); in short, the principles upon which this Christian nation was founded.

We oppose atheism, socialism, racism, collectivism, pluralism, social engineering, the New World Order and the United Nations; in short, the ideologies of tyranny.

**Focus areas:** Individual rights, the right to own and use private property, multiple use of public lands (federal and state), road closures, roadless areas, mining, ranching, farming, logging, grazing, livestock, hunting, fishing, trapping and water use regulations.

Our elected officials and many other public servants have sworn a solemn oath of office. We expect them to abide by and work within those guidelines. Nothing more, nothing less. A little more would be nice, but anything less is intolerable.

Our meetings are open to all interested citizens. We even welcome moles. Who knows, they may see the light? Interested persons can call us at 293-1356, drop us a line at P.O. Box 387, Libby, MT, 59923, or visit our website, [www.project56.org](http://www.project56.org). Our motto is: Obey God, Serve Mankind, Oppose Tyranny. If you have a problem with that you may not enjoy our meetings.

**Ken Short**  
Vice-Chair



## UM research focuses on asbestos victims

Libby's asbestos victims will be a prime concern for research at the recently created Center for Environmental Health Science at the University of Montana, according to the center's director.

Dr. Andre Holian, a toxicologist chosen in July to head the center, spoke with local government officials, hospital administrators and asbestos victims Wednesday via speaker phone. Holian had planned to tour St. John's Lutheran Hospital's Center for Asbestos Related Disease along with U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, but bad weather prevented the two from making it to Libby.

Holian said he has been researching lung diseases for about 20 years, especially diseases relat-

ed to exposure to silicates and asbestos. The study of the asbestos situation in Libby is written into the mission statement of the new environmental health center in Missoula, Holian said.

It's a foregone conclusion that exposure to asbestos has resulted in lung disease among Libby residents, Holian said.

"What we're interested in now is how we can assist in making things better," he said.

Research at the center will include developing techniques for early detection, diagnosing people who are particularly susceptible to asbestos-related disease and helping to develop new treatments, Holian said.

One area of study planned for the center is the relationship between genetic susceptibility and environmental exposure in the development of lung diseases. An outline prepared by the center notes that while such a link has been recognized for many years, the genes involved have not been identified. Determining genetic elements that might confer a greater susceptibility to the development of lung disease in the Libby population is listed as one of the proposed studies at the center.

Another proposed study is to determine why the specific types of asbestos found near Libby are so potent in their potential to cause disease.

# Baucus agrees to pursue screening statistics

■ Local officials express concerns about planning without ATSDR statistics on numbers of people

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

U.S. Sen. Max Baucus pledged this week to pressure federal agencies to release statistics from recent health screenings and to develop a plan to investigate area homes for asbestos contamination.

Baucus had planned to visit Libby

Wednesday but his plane was unable to land due to bad weather. Instead, the senator spoke over a speaker phone to healthcare providers, county officials and asbestos victims.

Local officials and healthcare administrators are hoping for the timely release of data from screenings conducted by the

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Close to 7,000 people were screened for possible asbestos-related lung diseases. According to ATSDR officials, preliminary findings indicate that around 10 percent of those screened may be affected. While those people whose tests showed abnormalities are being notified individually, actual numbers have not been released publicly.

Those numbers are needed to help plan for the future, Lincoln County Commissioner John Konzen said.

"We still don't have good enough facts to really take and go anywhere with," Konzen said.

The county could begin long-range planning for the medical needs of area residents if it had that information, Commissioner Windom said.

"We're kind of working in the dark," she said. "We don't have any statistics to work on, and frankly time is of the essence."

St. John's Lutheran Hospital is working

See **Statistics** on Page 3

## Statistics

Continued from Page 1  
on best guesses, chief executive officer Rick Palagi said.

"We're guesstimating still — because we can't do anything else — that 650 to 1,000 folks, maybe more than 1,000, have or will develop some sort of asbestos-related disease," he said.

Palagi said ATSDR officials have indicated that firm numbers may not be released until next June.

"Off the top, as a layman, that doesn't make much sense to me," Baucus said.

Another concern presented to Baucus involves the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to look into the issue of asbestos contamination in area houses. Some initial tests have been completed, but further investigation was given a lower priority than the cleanup of former W.R. Grace processing sites.

The cleanup at the former Grace export plant in Libby, now the site of the city's industrial park, is nearly finished. Work at the former

screening facility at the mouth of Rainy Creek is ongoing, but Grace's refusal to allow excavated soil to be dumped at the former mine site has resulted in a lawsuit in federal court. Konzen and county health officer Dr. Brad Black expressed concerns that the court battle is taking EPA resources away from Libby.

Black also questioned whether the EPA's actions in Libby will receive the same high level of support under the next federal administration.

"The headquarters of the EPA as you know is a real political area," Black told Baucus.

Baucus promised to speak with ATSDR officials about the release of screening statistics and to try to get the EPA to allocate more resources to Libby for the investigation of asbestos contamination in private homes. Addressing other concerns of hospital representatives, Baucus also said he would meet with Grace officials to gauge the company's support for a medical trust fund in Libby.



Western News Nov 27, 2000

## NOTICE TO HOMEOWNERS

The Lincoln County Environmental Health Department is establishing a Registry of Homes in the county that contain Vermiculite (Zonolite) insulation

The program's purpose is to create a database of vermiculite-insulated structures, listing the number, location, size and condition of these buildings.

The information will help:

- A. Identify areas where there may be higher risk for asbestos exposure.
- B. Spot structures which may need more materials or air sampling.
- C. Identify potential need for additional ambient air monitoring sites.
- D. Provide baseline information on the scope and size of any future cleanup or removal programs.

Your participation will help Lincoln County secure funding to conduct home and air sampling. The registry could lead to help for removal or cleanup of insulation, depending on the results of EPA's risk assessment.

To obtain a registry form or for answers to your questions concerning the program, contact the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department at 293-7781, ext. 228. Our office is located at 418 Mineral Avenue in Libby.



## **ASK EPA!!**

**Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation**

**Q: What will EPA be working on now that the cleanup actions are being shut down for the winter?**

**A: The asbestos exposure investigation is being done in phases. EPA is currently finalizing plans to do Phase 2 of the Libby site investigation.**

Phase 1 of the investigation (all the sampling that has taken place to date) revealed tremolite asbestos fibers in some samples of indoor air, dust, soil, and insulation. The greatest emphasis has been placed on collection and analysis of air samples because inhalation poses the greatest health risk from asbestos. EPA collected most air samples using a stationary air monitor located in the principal living area of the home. The concentration of fibers was estimated using Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM). Phase 1 was necessary to determine whether there was need for an emergency response in residential areas in and around Libby.

Phase 2 is intended to measure more specifically any asbestos exposure during residents' routine activities. Phase 2 tasks include:

- 1) measuring asbestos levels in the air when individuals are engaged in routine and special activities in and around Libby i.e., vacuuming, dusting working in an attic, gardening, etc.;
- 2) comparing those measurements to data collected from stationary air monitors at the same location;
- 3) analyzing the air samples by both the TEM and PCM methods in order to see the relationship between the two;
- 4) determining which type of measurement is most appropriate; and
- 5) using the data to help assess health risk to people who engage in the types of routine and special activities investigated during the study.

EPA invites public comment on the Phase 2 Sampling and Quality Assurance Project Plan. The draft Plan can be found in the EPA information center or with and CAG member. Comments received by January 1st will be fully considered and may be incorporated into the final version of the Plan. EPA hopes to begin sampling in early February.

**For more information call:**

**Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator,  
at 406-441-1150 x241 or  
Dr. Chris Weis, Science Coordinator at 303-312-6671**

# Grace accepts Racicot's offer to facilitate

A W.R. Grace executive has accepted an offer from Gov. Marc Racicot to facilitate a meeting with Environmental Protection Agency officials in an attempt to resolve access issues on Grace-controlled property in the Libby area.

In an Oct. 30 letter, Racicot urged Grace and the EPA to work together on issues involving disposal of asbestos-contaminated soil at the former Grace mine site. He also offered to participate in a meeting between upper level Grace and EPA officials.

In a Nov. 8 letter to Racicot, Grace vice president Bill Corcoran said he welcomed the governor's initiative.

"We are prepared to meet at your earliest convenience," Corcoran wrote. "Please let me know when it can be arranged."

The soil EPA wants to dispose of at the mine site was excavated during the ongoing cleanup operations at Grace's former screening plant at the mouth of Rainy Creek. Earlier this year Grace purchased a controlling interest in Kootenai Development Corp., which owns the for-

mer mine site, and barred EPA from dumping the materials.

According to Grace, access was refused because EPA has not tested the soil to identify possible contaminants other than asbestos. EPA has filed a lawsuit in an attempt to gain access.

The estimated 70,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil at the screening plant could benefit reclamation efforts at the mine site, Racicot said in his letter to Grace and the EPA.

"Although the soil is contaminated, it is

still capable of growing vegetation and serving as a growth medium for covering areas at the mine needing additional reclamation," he said. "This is a possible element of reclamation that would be unavailable if the contaminated material is ultimately shipped to another site for disposal."

The contaminated soil is being stored at the former screening plant for the winter. The EPA has estimated the cost of

See **Cleanup** on Page 7

## Cleanup

Continued from Page 1  
transporting the soil out of the area for disposal at \$4.5 million.

"Possibly we are at a point where senior management needs to meet, assess where we are and provide the common direction to finishing this important job," Racicot said in his letter.

In addition to refusing to allow the EPA to dispose of materials at the mine site, Grace has barred the agency from taking cleanup actions on KDC properties adjacent to the screening plant site. Alan Stringer, Grace's representative in Libby, said the company has offered to clean up those sites with the oversight of the EPA but has not received a response from the agency.

While the EPA is directly managing the cleanup of the screening plant site, Grace is cleaning up its former export plant in Libby. Cleanup of the buildings at that location has been completed, and the remaining excavation and backfill work is expected to be finished before Christmas, Stringer said.

## Parkers haven't gotten wealthy or taken care of by Grace

To the Editor:

We have been approached on different occasions by folks who have heard that we made a settlement with W.R. Grace. Apparently these people feel we have gained a very significant sum of money. False rumor.

Unfortunately we are still the Parkers who have not been reimbursed for loss of personal, busi-

ness or real property. We have not signed an agreement with Grace or the EPA in terms of what you see as you drive by our property on Montana Highway 37. We are just like you folks, trying to make a go of it until the clean-up is complete and we can get back on our feet and get on with our life.

The clean-up on our property was designated as of "Immediate

Concern" and the restoration of our land was originally scheduled to be completed by Oct. 30. This as you are aware of is not going to happen.

We have heard rumors of our good fortune and want to thank those who initiated them. Everyone in life has fantasies and fortunately for us you have fulfilled ours beyond our wildest dreams. But re-

member these are just false rumors.

The facts are: W.R. Grace did not purchase our land nor compensate us for any of the Raintree Nursery business. Nor did they purchase the home we are living in. Nor the vehicles we are driving.

For those who have initiated these rumors I sincerely hope you now know the true facts.

**Mel and Lerah Parker**

## People outside of Libby care about what is happening

To the Editor:

As most of you know, I grew up in the great town of Libby, Montana.

I graduated from Libby Senior High in 1981. And then moved to California where I reside today.

I'm writing this letter to let the community of Libby know that you all have the support of residents in California on the issue of the asbestos dilemma that has plagued your community and affected so many families, including my own.

I think that it is a tragedy that this has gone on for so long hidden from all of us. W.R. Grace needs to be held accountable for their actions. And I believe that the only

way we can do this is to reach out to other communities all over the country for support. And my mission in life now is to get this information out to as many communities as possible.

I believe what we need to do is to use the media, such as newspapers, television, radio, etc. I've spoken to a lot of experts on the subject here in California and they've all given me the same answer; go to the media and get as much exposure as possible. Then, and only then, will the wonderful people of W.R. Grace Inc. realize that the people of Libby are not fooled by their empty compassion for the citizens of our community.

I love Libby, Montana, and hope to someday soon move back to that state.

And I just want everyone to know that you all have the support of people that care enough to listen. My employer has graciously donated ribbon for your support committee. His name is Mike Suppe and he represents the Loss Prevention Department at Michaels RDC., in Lancaster, Calif. I have several co-workers that are willing to wear these ribbons in support of the fine people of Libby. People do care, they just need to be told of the devastation that is occurring in my hometown.

This is my way of saying we're

out here and we're behind Libby every step of the way. Until W.R. Grace is held accountable, we will not rest. Keep up the great work and please send me as much information as you can, so I can continue to spread the word in local and big city newspapers across California.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts on this awful situation. Our prayers are with everyone in Libby.

**Jamie MacDonald  
Swartzwelder  
Rosamond, Calif.**

P.S. Please send me any new information at  
Blondebomber3680@cs.com.

WESTERN News

NOV 8, 2000

# ATSDR program tests 6,075 people

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

In a four-month period, the medical screening program for asbestos-related disease ran 6,075 people through the breathing test and chest X-rays, said Myrna Lundy, site coordinator.

That's more than twice the 3,000 people the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry estimated would take part.

Thursday, Nov. 2, was the final day for the testing program, which began July 5 in a new, modular building beside the Prompt Care medical clinic. The program was designed to identify people who may have problems due to inhaling

asbestos from a former vermiculite mine near Libby.

Asbestos, an invisible mineral fiber, is known to cause damage to lungs and lung linings.

Counting the 70 people tested in Elko, Nev., in late October, 6,145 people participated in the screening, Lundy said.

The Nevada testing was launched because a concentration of former Libby residents moved there in search of mining jobs after the W.R. Grace mine shut down in 1990.

The overall test data is to help identify people with asbestos-related health problems as well as identify exposure pathways by which people came in contact with the asbestos

contaminated vermiculite.

The end of testing for the year brings an end to the most visible phase of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project. ATSDR has targeted January for issuing a formal report. That will summarize the preliminary information for the first 3,000 people who had X-rays and lung-function tests, and discuss the number of abnormalities found.

The testing personnel will move out of the facility by Nov. 14, Lundy said.

Test participants are to receive their individual results in the mail about three months after they were tested.

## EPA cleans vermiculite from yards in Minneapolis

### ■ More homes targeted for cleanup next spring

Workers from the Environmental Protection Agency completed removing asbestos-contaminated soil earlier this month from 21 northeast Minneapolis homes, reported the Minneapolis Star-Tribune.

Workers removed six to 18 inches of topsoil from gardens, flower beds and unpaved driveways replacing it with clean soil or gravel, the newspaper reported.

The contaminated soil is from

vermiculite processed at the Western Mineral Products Co. plant that operated from the 1930s through late 1980s processing vermiculite from the Libby mine into Zonolite insulation. A "free rock" pile made material available to the public at the plant. The Star-Tribune reported that neighbors used the material as a sand substitute in their yards.

Cleanup is expected in the spring on the properties at two dozen more homes.

The newspaper story reported that the EPA has had contact with 322 property owners in northeast

Minneapolis and inspected soil at 200 properties.

While the EPA is concentrating on residential property, the State of Minnesota is taking charge of the cleanup at the former processing plant, reported the Star-Tribune. The residential cleanup is expected to cost \$600,000 and is being funded through the Superfund program, which will try to recover costs from the pollution source at a later date.

In addition, state health officials expect to conduct a community exposure investigation with hopes of receiving federal funding to cover costs.



## **ASK EPA!!** *Western News* Nov 8, 2000

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: I've heard that Lincoln County is developing a registry of vermiculite insulated homes and structures in our county. What benefit will there be for me to put my name on this list?**

**A: The program's purpose is to create a database of vermiculite-insulated structures, listing the number, location, size and condition of these buildings.**

**The information will help:**

- A. Identify areas where there may be higher risk for asbestos exposure.**
- B. Spot structures which may need more materials or air sampling**
- C. Identifying potential need for additional ambient air monitoring sites.**
- D. Providing baseline information on the scope and size of any future cleanup or removal programs.**

**Your participation will help Lincoln County secure funding to conduct home and air sampling. The registry could lead to help for removal or cleanup of insulation, depending on the results of EPA's risk assessment.**

**To obtain a registry form or for answers to your questions concerning the program, contact the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department at 293-7781 ext. 228. Their office is located at 418 Mineral Ave. in Libby.**

**You may also contact EPA's Community Involvement Coordinator,  
Wendy Thomi, at 406-441-1150 ext. 241**

# Medically underserved designation pursued for Libby

By ROGER MORRIS

Western News Publisher

Designation of Libby as a medically underserved community is being pursued as part of the effort to expand local health care services, local and state officials said last week during the Citizens Advisory meeting.

Designation is the first step in the community receiving a federally qualified health center, said Rick Palagi, CEO and administrator at St. John's Lutheran hospital in Libby.

That designation could bring a "chunk of

- 6,075 people screened
- EPA cleans yards in Minn.
- Community help offered

See Page 3

money" to establish medical services through a clinic for people who can't afford it now, including people without asbestos-related diseases.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry asked 1,000 people par-

ticipating in the medical screenings for asbestos exposure if they had health insurance. The question was requested by Dr. Mike Spence, state medical officer.

Twenty-one percent of the people are uninsured and if senior citizens, 65 and older are excluded because of Medicare coverage — the percentage is as high as 24 percent of the Libby community, Spence said. Also, some people with health insurance have high monthly co-payments and/or high deductibles.

Cost of medical services for asbestos-related disease is estimated at \$450,000 to

\$500,000.

Although senior citizens have Medicare, it pays about 80 percent, Spence continued. "Some people are just getting by on social security and can't afford the 20 percent," he said.

He said the information will be used to find funding for medical services. "We need to provide for the expansion of overall care," Spence said.

Palagi said the process to be designated a medical underserved community usually

See Designation on Page 6

## Designation

Continued from Page 1

takes 6-18 months but Libby's application has been put on a fast track of 90 days.

"Once we have that we can apply for a federally qualified health center," he said.

Such a health center could be a separate physical plant from the existing hospital or the services can be incorporated within the existing medical community with the addition of some space and personnel.

Spence said Libby can shape its request to the National Health Institute to meet the community's medical needs for area residents with asbestos-related diseases and without.

"I'm very hopeful that we are well on the road that way," he said.

In related business, Palagi said the Environmental Protection Agency and the ATSDR are working as "best they can work" within the limitations placed on them. He

included funding among the limitations.

Asbestos victims and local medical representatives have questioned ATSDR's reluctance to commit to Cat scans to diagnose asbestos-related diseases.

Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger, local ATSDR representative, said not everyone needs a Cat scan and there is additional radiation exposure for people undergoing the test.

Also, he said there was a large

expense to use the equipment for such a large group.

Palagi said the hospital is working with ATSDR to make existing equipment available but only four scans a day can be done while meeting the health care needs of the overall community, too.

For expansion of medical services in Libby, Palagi said there were three sources of funding: state and federal appropriations, W.R. Grace and private philanthropy.

## TOSC offers tech help to communities

A federally-funded program based at Montana Tech in Butte could provide the local community with interpretation of the technical issues facing it in the vermiculite cleanup and pollution.

Kevin Mellott, assistant project manager for the Technical Outreach Services for Communities, gave a presentation of the program's services during the Citizens Advisory Group meeting last week.

"We're not going to come in and say this is what you should do or this is what you shouldn't do," Mellott said. "We breakdown other people's reports and present it. We interpret the data so it is understandable."

Presently, there are two locations in the Libby area where cleanup efforts are under way to remove asbestos contaminated vermiculite left behind by W.R. Grace from its former vermiculite mine and processing plant. Grace closed the mine in 1990 and finished dismantling its operations by 1992.

Mellott said TOSC would provide fundamental science information, interpret reports and summarize them, clarify the regulatory process and provide site specific information.

They would also help organize public meetings and write reports.

TOSC can only respond to a request from state, county and city



# Rough sample supporting original estimates

## Small, preliminary sampling indicates 9-10 percent of people showing lung abnormalities

BY ROGER MORRIS

Western News Editor

Nine to 10 percent of the people from a small sampling in the Libby asbestos medical screening program have been referred for further evaluation, said a federal official Wednesday night.

The sampling was based on available statistics for 429 sets of x-rays examined for lung abnormalities or pleural thickening or hardening of the wall of the lung.

"It is extremely preliminary," said Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry during a Citizens Advisory Group meeting. "Deriving any conclusions out of this may be difficult."

Lybarger said he hopes to have enough information by January for the "beginnings of some stable numbers."

The x-rays are scanned by Dr. Stephen Becker in Libby for immediate concerns

and then passed on to certified specialists at three separate locations. The third reader is there to confirm the recommendations of the first two.

Lybarger noted that from the 429 cases in the sampling he was given, the first reader recommended 9 percent for further evaluation while the second reader recommended 10 percent.

These are people showing lung abnormalities or pleural thickening of the lung

wall, he said.

Other abnormalities identified during the screening could and did include heart related ailments, scars from previous surgeries, vessel conditions, hiatal hernia and interstitial abnormality.

"The most likely to be from exposure (to asbestos contaminated vermiculite) are the pleural thickenings," he said.

See **Sampling** on Page 8

### Sampling

Continued from Page 1

"We do not know how those referred participants are distributed by risk of exposure," Lybarger said.

That is, the statistics weren't compiled yet on whether they were workers, members of a worker's household or whether they played in the vermiculite piles as children.

"It is still too early to begin planning based on this information," he said. "ATSDR will begin this fall in developing recommendations about re-testing."

The final data will help the federal officials determine how often to test for people in high risk of developing an asbestos-related disease from past exposure.

Asbestos-related diseases take 20 or more years to show up and the Libby vermiculite mine has been closed for 10 years. However, vermiculite ore was shipped out of the area for several years after the mine closed.

Lybarger said as results of more people are factored in the percentage of people needing additional evaluation will fluctuate up and down.

"It does give us an inkling of what we are starting to find," he

said.

Lybarger explained that ATSDR is continuing to collect and organize available data from the screening of 5,497 participants. As of Oct. 26, ATSDR had taken 6,415 appointments with 5,959 people completing the screening as of Oct. 31.

Sixty-five percent of the people screened live within the Libby zip code, roughly 660 of the people worked for W. R. Grace or for a contractor working with asbestos-contaminated vermiculite. 1,085 people lived in a household that included a Grace employee.

Lybarger will have a written report of the statistical breakdowns in January.

"The written report will focus on providing you the community to start doing health care planning," he said. A detailed analysis will have to wait until about February because ATSDR is still testing."

Local, state and federal medical officials have been estimating that 10-15 percent of the people in the Libby medical screenings program will be found to be suffering from an asbestos-related disease.

# Commissioners letter called insulting to community, asbestos victims

To the Editor:  
I find the letter from the county commissioners published in *The Western News* offensive to me, the victims of asbestosis and the voters of Lincoln County.

The commissioners publicly thank Mr. Baucus and Mr. Burns for their efforts in their monetary help for the community. This is fine and Mr. Baucus has truly helped, but Mr. Burns, except for obtaining \$3.5 million for a new wing for the hospital and \$8 million for the EDC to use as they wish, has not helped the sick and dying in the community.

Mr. Crismore, the self-appointed head of the committee has publicly stated that none of the money will go for victims' relief or cleanup. Mr. Crismore was also asked by the victims if someone from their group

could serve on the committee to oversee the spending of the money. This was denied also.

We know the position of Mr. Crismore and Burns and other elected and self-appointed leaders of this community and state. Mr. Burns co-sponsored the Fairness in Asbestos Bill, which would have been a bailout for the asbestos companies and W.R. Grace. Only when a group of victims from Libby traveled to Washington, D.C., and publicly fought the bill, was the Senate version shelved. Only then, did Mr. Burns back off the bill, but publicly supports the House version of the bill. His refusal to even meet with this delegation in Washington, D.C., is not a sign of someone who was voted in to represent all of the people of Montana. Is this a sign of a

truly great leader?

I find it offensive that the commissioners refer to the outside media's reporting of the situation as degrading to the community and causing a lack of tourism. Without the outside media, this problem would have never come to light. The local media, the elected officials within Montana, didn't seem to think it was a problem. Why then are we number 1 in the nation for asbestos related disease? Here in Libby, Montana?

Yes, there was a problem! The egg is on the faces of those who sat back and did nothing to help.

I would like to personally thank the self-serving egotistical public officials, the caring and genuine concern that they have shown for getting this corporate, money-grub-

bing mess cleaned up. I might as well throw in our local news media, business community and Chamber of Commerce for their help also. I think it's time that they stop thinking about the dead and sick and dying trees and start thinking about the dead, sick and dying people in this community. It's time to stop begging and pleading with W.R. Grace. We need leadership in this community and within this state.

It's time for W.R. Grace and the elected officials of Montana to face up to their moral responsibility. Quit stalling and let's get this mess cleaned up.

In short, I find that the commissioners' letter was nothing more than an offhanded endorsement for Conrad Burns. Shame on you.

Dave Benefield

# Blue ribbons support local residents impacted by asbestos

By Laura Sedler

As a facilitator of the Support Group for Individuals Impacted by Asbestos I've been asked by that group to write a short piece to "let people know what this is about."

You've likely seen some blue ribbons around town since the Conference on Asbestos that was held here in September. That effort was begun by women in the support group, and in the past weeks they've taken more ribbons around town, asking local businesses to display them, encouraging people to wear a ribbon.

Why?, you might ask.

Most of us are aware, as the screening letters go out, that the number of people known to have asbestos-related illness is gradually rising. We're aware too that each of those numbers represents not only an individual with disease, but that individual's family, friends, employers and co-workers. Each individual's illness impacts in turn the church group, the bowling league, the organizations people volunteer for, and the stores they shop at.

Asbestos exposure – one way or another – has impacted everyone, every business, and every organization in our community. No matter where you come down along the continuum of blame, responsibility, and who should pay

## Another View

by Laura Sedler

for what, one thing is clear: people are suffering. Some families have had so many members diagnosed with – or already deceased from – an asbestos related disease, that you may wonder how they keep going at all.

Blue ribbons are, perhaps, a way of reminding us of that suffering. Libby is a community with many strengths: we've pulled together for Sally and Amanda, we've turned the destruction of the micro-burst into works of creative art. We understand suffering and loss, and that when storms descend, we need to stand together and find solutions. Libby can build on its strengths: by agreeing on one single principle we put in place a foundation to work from.

The politics of asbestos exposure will be with us for a long time; the suffering of those whose health has been compromised will be with us even longer. Blue ribbons may remind us that there are people behind those numbers,

neighbors with families, with sons and daughters whose futures they now fear for. Because of the nature of the disease many of these people are invisible: the man in line behind you at the grocery checkout or the woman sitting next to you at the ball game may have asbestosis.

Grief, too, may remain concealed: you may not know that your neighbor's spouse died of this and that they have lost an uncle as well. You may know only that they had a "long illness."

Wearing a blue ribbon shows people that you acknowledge their suffering. Wearing a blue ribbon says: we in Libby care about the losses asbestos exposure has caused in so many of our lives. Agreement on this one point may be the basis for coming together and finding the work of art hidden in the destruction.

Please consider pinning on a blue ribbon, and showing your support for asbestos victims.

*Laura Sedler is not only the facilitator for the support group for individuals impacted by asbestos, she is a medical social worker at St. John's Lutheran Hospital and including the Community Healthline, a monthly series of educational articles that appear in The Western News on current medical concerns.*

# Candidates pledge support to Libby victims

BY LYNNETTE HINTZE  
Special to the News

Candidates in key Montana political races pledged their support to asbestos victims, in response to a query from Libby residents about how they would handle the asbestos-related legislation.

Libby activist Gayla Benefield, whose parents died from asbestos disease linked to exposure from the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine near Libby, wrote the letter signed by more than 200 Libby residents. Since the letter went out to candidates last week, Montana AFL-CIO labor organizations and the National Association of social workers have joined her cause.

Benefield's letter asked candidates if they'll take political contributions from the asbestos industry and how they stand on the pending Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act.

Democratic congressional candidate Nancy Keenan said taking campaign money from the asbestos industry is "morally wrong."

"Please be assured that I have not and will not accept any political contributions from the asbestos industry or their allies," Keenan said in a letter to Benefield.

Keenan's opponent, Republican Dennis Rehberg, didn't address the political contribution question. His campaign manager, Alan Mikkelsen, said Rehberg will make sure the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "continues to do its job in cleaning up the environment there."

"Denny has already said on numerous occasions that he wants to make sure that victims are justly compensated," Mikkelsen said, adding that Rehberg favors allowing victims to sue for punitive damages.

Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Brian Schweitzer told Libby residents he wouldn't take contributions from the asbestos industry. But there's an ongoing debate with his opponent, incumbent Republican Conrad Burns, about how much each has received in contributions from asbestos-related entities.

Schweitzer claims Burns has taken more than \$500,000 from the asbestos industry, including \$157,000 in direct

## Candidates

Continued from Page 1

contributions and the rest in indirect donations from trade associations and other affiliates that would be affected by the outcome of asbestos legislation.

Burns' campaign spokesman Dick Wadhams claimed Schweitzer has accepted \$135,000, largely from trial lawyers who stand to gain financially from asbestos litigation.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mark O'Keefe said he hasn't received any contributions from the asbestos industry.

"All Montanans deserve a governor who will work for Montana family interests, not special interests," O'Keefe said.

"The situation in Libby is a good example why Montana needs an independent governor."

Republican gubernatorial candidate Judy Martz has not yet replied to Benefield's letter.

Several candidates reiterated their opposition to the Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act, a federal bill that didn't muster enough support to pass.

Burns was a co-sponsor of the

bill but in March withdrew his sponsorship, saying the bill was "hopelessly mired in controversy." At the time, he said he'd worked with authors of a similar House bill to push for stronger penalties for companies that don't make good-faith settlement offers to asbestos victims. He also pushed for punitive damages, strict and enforceable time limits for participants in an administrative-claims process, and a provision allowing victims to proceed to court without mediation.

Schweitzer said it's time to "stand up to W.R. Grace and hold them accountable for their actions."

"I would take every opportunity to explore the evidence of the dangers of asbestos and consider a ban similar to the ban in many European countries," Schweitzer said.

Keenan told Benefield she would urge the Justice Department to investigate possible criminal activity by Grace executives "who knowingly exposed mine workers and their families to fatal levels of asbestos."

*Lynnette Hintze is reporter for the Kalispell Daily Inter Lake.*

## Asbestos Medical Screenings

# Former Libby residents tested at Elko, Nevada

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

Seventy former Libby-area residents, about one for every 83 tested in Libby, went through the screening for asbestos-related diseases in Elko, Nev., last week, according to the Libby screening site coordinator.

Ninety three people had registered, a rate of 75 percent, said Myrna Lundy, who oversees operation of the Libby Community

Environmental Health Project.

The project offers a breathing test and chest X-rays. It's a large-scale effort to determine the extent of disease caused by asbestos, a mineral fiber unearthed at a former vermiculite mine near Libby.

The diseases have no known cures and include asbestosis, mesothelioma, cancer of the lungs, lung linings and other cancers.

The 70 people tested in Elko bring the total number of people participating in

the screening process to 5,912 through Sunday night, Lundy said. Appointments in both areas totaled 6,873.

Elko was chosen as a second testing site because many former Libby residents now live there. Families from Libby moved to the Elko area in search of mining jobs after the Grace operation closed in 1990.

The Elko testing was held Monday through Sunday, Lundy said. Results will be mailed to individuals as the coordinating organization, the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, determines the extent of the contamination from the Libby mine.

To the Editor:

A recent mailer sent out by Cajun James, candidate for county commissioner, contains some inaccurate and completely misleading statements that require us to respond.

Normally it would not seem appropriate to respond directly to a political ad in an election year. But one statement contained in Mr. James' mailer reflected not only on the integrity of his opponent, Commissioner Marianne Roose, but also against the integrity and honesty of the other members of past and current county commissions.

Mr. James insinuates that the \$21 million "surplus" in the county

where the for law require: county receive on county road be used to services or ol

For decade county commission careful in the future. Over the reserve has This reserve the principal cannot be spent other than state federal law earnings to support of county these invest

“I am 90 percent confident that we are going to go above 6,000 people tested.”

Myrna Lundy  
coordinator

# Palagi offers needed improvements to Grace plan

Another View  
by Rick Palagi

- (1) Admittance to a long-term care facility or assisted living facility upon physician order is a covered service.
- (12) Preventive treatments and medicines, and physician as judged to be beneficial in preventing further compromise of an eligible individual's health because of ARD are a covered benefit.

- (1) The establishment of reserves and compliance with all federal and state laws including ERISA requirements.
- (2) The perpetuity of the plan needs to be insured through a trust mechanism or some other guaranty of funding indefinitely into the future.

- (3) The final decision of any medical dispute would be decided by a physician mutually agreed to by the eligible individual and the company.

Dr. Kardos, if these changes and additions are included in the Grace Medical Benefit Plan Version 4, the company will have traveled a long way towards its commitment of "doing the right thing."

Thank you for your consideration of these additions.  
On behalf of the CAG and all residents of Lincoln County, I remain sincerely,

Richard Palagi  
MHSA, CEO

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letter is a response to Dr. Stephen Kardos, CEO of Health Network America, administrators of the medical plan offered by W. R. Grace to Libby asbestos victims. It was written by Rick Palagi, CEO and administrator of St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby.

Dear Dr. Kardos:  
In the spirit of viewing the glass as half full and following your suggestion, here are specific changes we believe should be made to the Grace Medical Plan.

- (1) The eligibility for receiving benefits under the plan version 03, changes "12 consecutive months" to "6 cumulative months."
- (2) The section of the plan beginning on Page 5 entitled "Qualifying Medical Condition" is removed. It is confusing and not necessary because the plan specifies under "Covered Conditions" the qualifying medical criteria to justify or not reimbursement for medical expenses.

- (3) The plan will reimburse 100 percent any covered medical expense for eligible individuals as prescribed or ordered by a licensed physician whose primary practice location is Lincoln County, Montana, or a board certified pulmonologist.
- (4) Annual checkups and screening, or as frequently as deemed necessary by the physician is a covered benefit. This will ensure that all eligible individuals would be provided with the means for early detection, treatment and ongoing

- (5) Individual and family counseling by social workers or licensed professional counselors is a covered benefit.
- (6) Home Health care and Hospice care is a covered benefit upon a physician's order for these services. The Medicare definition of "home bound" is not necessary for Home Health or Hospice to be covered. This benefit will include reimbursement for personal care and homemaker services, rehabilitation and respiratory therapy as indicated by the patient's condition.

- (7) Prescription drugs prescribed by a physician will be reimbursed at the 90 percent per centile for community pharmacies.
- (8) Respite care within a hospital or other appropriate facility for up to five consecutive days is a covered benefit.
- (9) Emergency transport to the closest, licensed acute care hospital capable of adequately treating the patient's condition is a covered benefit.
- (10) Home evaluations for the purposes of adapting the home to achieve maximum independence and usability for activities of daily living is a covered benefit.





# ASK EPA. Western News Nov 2000

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: When can we expect the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to report on the results of asbestos medical testing now underway in Libby?**

**A: November 2000 - As individual results are sent to participants, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) will begin providing updates on the number of people tested and the percentage of individuals with abnormal test results. Because these updates will be based on increasing numbers of respondents, the percentage of abnormal results may change over time. Preliminary information will be presented at the November 1 Community Advisory Group meeting.**

**January 2001 - ATSDR will issue the first formal report summarizing preliminary information from the first 3,000 participants receiving x-rays and lung function tests. This report will contain information on the number of abnormalities observed.**

**June 2001 - ATSDR will release summarizing data gathered from all respondents who participated in the medical testing program.**

**For more information call  
ATSDR, Dan Holcomb at 1-888-42-ATSDR**

## Burns lost touch with Montana

To the Editor:  
Go back to 1988. Remember when then candidate Burns associated Senator John Melcher's seniority as a Washington, D.C., politician who had lost touch with Montana. Now Senator Burns wants Montanans to associate his seniority in the Senate as something that is "good" for Montana. He would like us to forget that he promised to be a two-term senator. He flat lied to us. There is no other conclusion to come to.

Apparently now, Senator Burns, has just got too attached to the Washington, D.C. money trough, he just can't seem to hold to his promise. It has been reported that

Burns has accepted \$500,000 from corporations who deal in asbestos. No wonder Burns has co-sponsored or supported their legislation. With that kind of money these corporations, such as W.R. Grace, can expect a return on investment from Burns.

Grace has already killed hundreds in Libby and the number will most undoubtedly, be in the tens of thousands across this nation as Burns just continues to rake in their money.

Burns just can't be trusted anymore. He has become a Washington, D.C. politician who has lost touch with Montana.

Don W. Wilkins

Western News Nov 2000

## Briefs

### Kootenai Carpets hosts haunted house

A haunted house at Kootenai Carpets on Saturday, Oct. 28, begins at 6 p.m. at the store, 819 Mineral Ave. in Libby.

Entrance will be at the store's rear. Signs will lead the way.

No person younger than 6 years old will be admitted without an adult. Proceeds from the \$2 admission fee will go to Libby High School, Libby Middle School and Plummer Elementary School.

For more information, call Marie during the day at 293-4949.

# Public not endangered says EPA

## ■ Peronard responds to Project 56 accusations

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

The director of the Environmental Protection Agency's cleanup operations in Libby has refuted accusations that EPA actions are exposing the public to increased levels of airborne asbestos contamination.

At issue is a recent newspaper advertisement by "Project 56," a local group that has been critical of state, local and federal government agencies on a wide range of issues. The group contended that the EPA's

statement that the community is not being exposed to dangerous levels of contamination caused by the cleanup is "untrue, fiction, fantasy, a fabrication."

Paul Peronard, EPA on-scene coordinator, said cleanup operations have reduced the amount of airborne fibers around the perimeter of former W.R. Grace facilities at the city's industrial park and at the mouth of Rainy Creek, EPA on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard said.

"What you've got to remember is we found fibers there before we started," Peronard said.

Project 56's advertisement focuses on the fact that some fibers have been detected

in the cleanup area, Peronard said.

"It ignores the fact that there were fibers there and nobody was doing anything to control them before the cleanup work," he said.

While there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos, worker-protection standards have been set at .10 fibers per cubic centimeter of air. Before cleanup started at the industrial park, levels as high as .009 fibers per cc were detected around the area's perimeter, and indoor sampling found up to .02 fibers per cc, Peronard said.

"You can't just leave it there because

See **EPA accused** on Page 8

8-The Western News, Libby, MT., Friday, October 27, 2000

## EPA accused

Continued from Page 1  
there's exposure," he said. "We knew that; that's why we started the cleanup."

Since work began, the highest reading around the perimeter has been .002 fibers per cc.

"It wasn't there the next day,"

Peronard said. "What it really means is we found a fiber in the sample."

Elevated levels of airborne asbestos have been found inside the buildings at the industrial park during cleanup work, Peronard said.

"That actually is a very expected

result," he said.

Dust-control efforts associated with the cleanup have been effective in keeping fibers from spreading and reducing the public's exposure to asbestos fibers, Peronard said. "When we're done, we will have eliminated it," he said.





# Opin

## Clean it up

One of my favorite statements, usually made by uncar-ing bureaucrats involved with environmental cleanups, is "the best technology we have."

Thankfully I haven't heard that yet from Paul Peronard, on-scene coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency, about the asbestos cleanup.

Instead Peronard is taking the position of 'why take a chance?' And that benefits this community in the long run.

Back in the late 1980s, a representative of the Department of Energy came to Gunnison, Colo., where I was working. He called a public meeting to discuss a troublesome pile of uranium tailings on the south edge of the city.

The tailings, acres and acres of yellow cake-like material, were more than 60 feet deep and extended beneath the surface far enough to have contaminated the local groundwater. It didn't help that the pile was sitting at the confluence of a major creek and river. A plume of underground pollution extended far downstream contaminating the drinking water for a large, exclusive subdivision and well beyond.

Anyway, the DOE officials kept telling us that the uranium tailings were located at the site in the late 1940s and 1950s using the best technology of the day. Then they proposed to use the best technology of today to stabilize and contain the pile at its existing site.

A considerable number of people made noise that moving the material created more of a hazard than leaving it in place. Fortunately, saner heads prevailed pointing out that leaving it in place only created the potential for continuing problems in the future, when we would discover once again that the best technology of the day wasn't good enough.

This was a \$21 million project when it started and the community did not have the resources to solve the problem. The DOE did.

In Libby today, we have precious little private land and it would seem extreme folly to limit its use forever by leaving the contaminated vermiculite in place and simply capping it. We'd be facing continuous uncertainty as to the safety of people living nearby and using that property. We'd be faced with a greater and longer effort at air monitoring.

It's disengenuous of Project 56 to bring their anti-federal government agenda to this issue without regularly attending the Citizens Advisory Group meetings and participating in the discussion. The only thing they can accomplish with this type of rhetoric is delaying the cleanup efforts beyond W.R. Grace's present efforts and extending the period of time that residents of this area are exposed to harmful materials.

This is one of the reasons I proposed a few weeks back that the county and city come together to hire outside expertise so local interests were represented. I have no doubt that the EPA is doing and will do an excellent job cleaning up the contaminated areas. It's just that at some point the community will have choices to make and it's better to have more advice than just the EPA's or the fear and hysteria stirred up by an anti-government group.

As to D.C. Orr's assertion in a letter on this page that the city council meeting on granting a variance to city zoning code on the asphalt issue was "above board:" It doesn't matter.

The city council violated the state's open meeting law by not advertising that meeting. The council also violated the state constitution, which specifically requires all levels of government in Montana to do everything they can to encourage public participation in the governing process.

If found guilty in a court of law, any decisions made during these illegal meetings are voided.

I'm surprised the "constitutionalists" haven't seized on this. Or do we only cite the constitution when it fits our personal agendas? — *Roger Morris*

ion

Western News

OCT 27, 2000

## To the Editor

### Asbestos issue makes asphalt plant look like beautification project

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I've noticed a common theme in the letters concerning the asphalt plant. People seem to think this was done in secret and are upset because they didn't have an opportunity to comment on this action.

I must come to the defense of the City Council. I was present at the special meeting called by the mayor to give Universal Development a variance. It was all open and above board.

That is not to say that this council wasn't counting on the apathy of the people they serve to slide one by you. You have to be at these meetings to see what goes on.

Only by being involved would

you know that the EPA's work plan that was endorsed by the council doesn't protect you from being exposed to asbestos. That environmental disaster is going to make putting an asphalt plant in town look like a community beautification project.

Only by taking the time to read that document would you see that the language it contained — "the structure will be erected at a location to be selected by the City of Libby" — was the real reason for endorsing this plan. If you had been one of only two citizens at that meeting you would have seen a councilman make a motion to put that \$400,000 asset on the mayor's property instead of using it for the city.

It may be too late to affect council's decisions in the two previous actions, asphalt or asbestos, but if you want to have a say in an environmental concern before they act you should get your chance at the next council meeting on Nov. 6 at 7 p.m. Come to that meeting and comment on the City of Libby's application to Montana Department of Environmental Quality for the purpose of landfarming hazardous waste at the cemetery — dangerously close to the ballfields. Haven't we been there before?

Yes, you heard that right. In an effort to cover up the folly of a city official, the mayor and his cronies have allowed hazardous waste to be

placed on the graves of Libby's dead. They called this a "personnel issue" so it would be kept confidential and hidden from the public.

The presence of more waste makes it necessary for them to continue the practice of hauling contaminated soil from private property to city property in the future. To do so they must apply for permission from DEQ, where it becomes a public issue.

If you are uncomfortable with this scenario, come to the meeting and ask the hard questions necessary to determine why they continue to operate in a manner so detrimental to the community they profess to love.

D.C. Orr

Notis were sent to all 614 residents of Libby, Mont.

1 . . .

## Public not endangered says EPA

By Brent Shrum, Western News Reporter

10/27/00

The director of the Environmental Protection Agency's cleanup operations in Libby has refuted accusations that EPA actions are exposing the public to increased levels of airborne asbestos contamination.

At issue is a recent newspaper advertisement by "Project 56," a local group that has been critical of state, local and federal government agencies on a wide range of issues. The group contended that the EPA's statement that the community is not being exposed to dangerous levels of contamination caused by the cleanup is "untrue, fiction, fantasy, a fabrication."

Paul Peronard, EPA on-scene coordinator, said cleanup operations have reduced the amount of airborne fibers around the perimeter of former W.R. Grace facilities at the city's industrial park and at the mouth of Rainy Creek, EPA on-scene coordinator Paul Peronard said.

"What you've got to remember is we found fibers there before we started," Peronard said. Project 56's advertisement focuses on the fact that some fibers have been detected in the cleanup area, Peronard said.

"It ignores the fact that there were fibers there and nobody was doing anything to control them before the cleanup work," he said.

While there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos, worker-protection standards have been set at .10 fibers per cubic centimeter of air. Before cleanup started at the industrial park, levels as high as .009 fibers per cc were detected around the area's perimeter, and indoor sampling found up to .02 fibers per cc, Peronard said.

"You can't just leave it there because there's exposure," he said. "We knew that; that's why we started the cleanup."

Since work began, the highest reading around the perimeter has been .002 fibers per cc.

"It wasn't there the next day," Peronard said. "What it really means is we found a fiber in the sample."

Elevated levels of airborne asbestos have been found inside the buildings at the industrial park during cleanup work, Peronard said.

"That actually is a very expected result," he said.

Dust-control efforts associated with the cleanup have been effective in keeping fibers from spreading and reducing the public's exposure to asbestos fibers, Peronard said. "When we're done, we will have eliminated it," he said.

*Western News 10/27/00*

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**D.C. Orr**

## *Clean it up*

*Western News 10/27/00*

One of my favorite statements, usually made by uncaring bureaucrats involved with environmental cleanups, is "the best technology we have."

Thankfully I haven't heard that yet from Paul Peronard, on-scene coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency, about the asbestos cleanup.

Instead Peronard is taking the position of 'why take a chance?' And that benefits this community in the long run.

Back in the late 1980s, a representative of the Department of Energy came to Gunnison, Colo., where I was working. He called a public meeting to discuss a troublesome pile of uranium tailings on the south edge of the city.

The tailings, acres and acres of yellow cake-like material, were more than 60 feet deep and extended beneath the surface far enough to have contaminated the local groundwater. It didn't help that the pile was sitting at the confluence of a major creek and river. A plume of underground pollution extended far downstream contaminating the drinking water for a large, exclusive subdivision and well beyond.

Anyway, the DOE officials kept telling us that the uranium tailings were located at the site in the late 1940s and 1950s using the best technology of the day. Then they proposed to use the best technology of today to stabilize and contain the pile at its existing site.

A considerable number of people made noise that moving the material created more of a hazard than leaving it in place. Fortunately, saner heads prevailed pointing out that leaving it in place only created the potential for continuing problems in the future, when we would discover once again that the best technology of the day wasn't good enough.

This was a \$21 million project when it started and the community did not have the resources to solve the problem. The DOE did.

In Libby today, we have precious little private land and it would seem extreme folly to limit its use forever by leaving the contaminated vermiculite in place and simply capping it. We'd be facing continuous uncertainty as to the safety of people living nearby and using that property. We'd be faced with a greater and longer effort at air monitoring.

It's disingenuous of Project 56 to bring their anti-federal government agenda to this issue without regularly attending the Citizens Advisory Group meetings and participating in the discussion. The only thing they can accomplish with this type of rhetoric is delaying the cleanup efforts beyond W.R. Grace's present efforts and extending the period of time that residents of this area are exposed to harmful materials.

This is one of the reasons I proposed a few weeks back that the county and city come together to hire outside expertise so local interests were represented. I have no doubt that the EPA is doing and will do an excellent job cleaning up the contaminated areas. It's just that at some point the community will have choices to make and it's better to have more advice than just the EPA's or the fear and hysteria stirred up by an anti-government group.

As to D.C. Orr's assertion in a letter on this page that the city council meeting on granting a variance to city zoning code on the asphalt issue was "above board:" It

doesn't matter.

The city council violated the state's open meeting law by not advertising that meeting. The council also violated the state constitution, which specifically requires all levels of government in Montana to do everything they can to encourage public participation in the governing process.

If found guilty in a court of law, any decisions made during these illegal meetings are voided.

I'm surprised the "constitutionalists" haven't seized on this. Or do we only cite the constitution when it fits our personal agendas? — *Roger Morris*

# Candidates' position on asbestos actively sought

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

A local advocate for asbestos victims is organizing an effort to pin down candidates' positions on asbestos issues before the Nov. 7 election.

"I feel that we need a commitment from the candidates before the election, if they're going to support us or not," Gayla Benefield said Monday.

Benefield has gathered more than 150 signatures for a questionnaire that will be sent to candidates for

mining a candidate's position on a variety of issues of concern to asbestos victims.

Candidates will be asked if they pledge to reject any contributions from the asbestos industry and if they would oppose the Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act and similar legislation.

A Senate version of the act was dropped, but the House version is expected to be revived, Benefield said. Billed as a way to streamline

The Western News, Libby, MT., Wednesday, October 25, 2000-7

## Candidates

Continued from Page 1

the compensation process for people with asbestos-related illnesses, the measure has been opposed by many asbestos victims and their families who believe it would leave many people without adequate compensation and help corporations more than victims.

The survey will ask candidates what actions they would take to protect mine workers, their families and the environment at the sites of expanding plants around the United States where asbestos-tainted vermiculite from Libby was processed.

Candidates will be asked if they support a comprehensive cleanup of asbestos contamination in Libby and if they would urge the federal Justice Department to conduct a

criminal investigation of W.R. Grace.

"I think this is the only way some of the victims are going to get closure," Benefield said.

Another question asks if a candidate would support a ban on the industrial use of asbestos. Most European countries have banned asbestos, Benefield said.

"The United States simply refuses to ban the use of asbestos," she said.

Most politicians have been slow to respond to Libby's asbestos victims, Benefield said. Federal appropriations delivered \$8 million to the city for economic development, \$3.5 million to St. John's Lutheran Hospital and \$6 million for local activities by the Agency for Toxic

Substances and Disease Registry, but Benefield was critical that none of the money went directly to asbestos victims.

She said she hopes the candidate

survey will help raise awareness of asbestos issues.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg, but this is the thing we need right now," she said.



## ASK EPA...AGAIN!!!

### Questions and TRUE Answers About Asbestos and EPA's Actions

**Q:** EPA recently issued a statement regarding the asbestos exposure of the people of Libby brought about by the actions of EPA. Your statement was that we are not being exposed to dangerous levels of contamination caused by the cleanup operations mandated by the EPA's Unilateral Order. Is this statement true?

**A:** NO!!! That is untrue, fiction, fantasy, a fabrication that we concocted to lull you into a false sense of security. Air monitoring done in conjunction with the cleanup has detected airborne asbestos fibers as a result of the cleanup, fibers that we know can remain airborne for up to 4.5 miles. EPA has always taken the position that there is absolutely NO safe level of exposure, NO risk protocols have been developed, NO minimum exposure limits have been set for non-occupational exposure, and NO dose response curve exists for asbestos toxicity. This stuff will kill you!!! The ONLY place we initially detected fibers was at the cleanup site, which means you were not being exposed until we started stirring up contaminated soil. We did have options to effect a remediation that would not expose every man, woman and child to a substance so deadly, but it would have meant actually informing the public of the risks. It was more expedient to just lie about it.

We are doing everything in our power to push this cleanup through before the health screening is finished so we can blame the results of our actions on WR Grace. You will see an increase in a variety of lethal and sublethal health problems over the next 10-20 years, but only in a non-occupational setting, that is, not to EPA workers but only to the people who live in Libby.

Fifteen years from now, we intend to "discover" a report detailing the harm we imposed on Libby. We will then mobilize all of our resources to "save" the people whose health has been affected by our actions today. This will include: an expanded cemetery, more ambulances, and FREE oxygen bottle carts. We will petition Congress to free up funds to mitigate the damages and this town will boom once more. You can use those funds, no strings attached, for necessities like a year round circus, a mountain climbing center, and a bigger, better courtroom for all the lawsuits brought against us. Because, at EPA, the love of money outweighs the value of human life, even if protection is our middle name.

For more info call: Wendi Thomi at 406-441-1150X241  
or Diana Hammer at 1-800-227-8917X6601  
For the TRUTH call: DC Orr 1-406-293-4702



# Efforts ongoing to find health care funding

By KAY STOUT

Westview News Reporter

■ Appointments mt 6:786  
See Page 1

Efforts are under way to find long-term

care for people with asbestos-related dis-

ease as the initial medical screening comes

to a close.

The most promising hope for Libby is in

history interview regarding exposure to

asbestos, a by-product of vermiculite

mined near Libby from the early 1920s on.

1990.

The screening program ends Nov. 2.

Administrator in Helena.

uninsured population," said a health-care

community being dubbed a "medically

breathing test, chest X-rays and personal

those people without health insurance

Local, state and regional health experts

have estimated that 10 to 15 percent of the

people participating in the medical screen-

ing will be found ill with an asbestos-relat-

See Health-care funding on page 7

Long-term health care for asbestos

Disease Registry

the Agency for Toxic Substances and

insurance, according to a spokesman for

and half of the screening, showing that about

50 percent of the people do not have health

status released recently from the sec-

ated vermiculite

ed malady because of exposure to the coat-

the area while the mine operated, has been

tree. But there's no large-scale provision

yet for people found to need long-term

medical care.

The greatest burden would likely be for

those people without health insurance

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See Page 1

Helena, MT

# Health-care funding

Continued from page 1

local medical community. The Montana Primary Care Association, a non-profit organization, has been a conduit of the money. The money would go to the Libby-Lincoln County Health Center, which would then be distributed to the hospital and the mental health center. The center would handle assessments, referrals and family therapy.

It would expand the use of "chief evangelists" for family doctors. The best prospect for such an application to the federal Bureau of Primary Health Care is a request for the Libby area to be designated a medically underserved population. Frideres said that such a designation, Libby could compete with other areas for funding for a federally qualified health center.

"We're actively pursuing a designation for Lincoln County," she said. "We're looking for signatories and then that'll be in the mail."

Frideres said it scored effectively based on poverty, elderly, minority, medically underserved, and range of primary care physicians to residents, she said.

The application is to be signed by MCGA director Alan Strange, Lincoln County Health Officer Brad Black and Marge Levine of the Montana Primary Care Office of the state public health department.

Another effort at long-term care is the grant application for Rural Health Outreach, written primarily by Laura Sedler of St. John's Community Outreach in Libby. The request goes to the federal Health Services and Resources Administration, or HRSA.

Signup has been minimal, however, person diagnosed with the diseases. medical expenses of any eligible offered to pay all mine-associated costs the mine. The company has W.R. Grace & Co. which operates the mine. One payment option is the plan John's will write off the charges, he said. John's normal charity-care policy, St. John's will write off the charges, he said. Frideres said it scored effectively based on poverty, elderly, minority, medically underserved, and range of primary care physicians to residents, she said.

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## ASK EPA!

Western News

Questions and Answers

about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: Will the Libby Community Advisory Group continue to meet about asbestos issues through the holidays?**

**A: Yes.** The community Advisory Group will continue to meet although they have decided to meet only once per month for the rest of the year 2000.

The Group met on October 12. There will be no meeting on October 26. You may review the meeting summaries on the EPA web page at: <http://www.epa.gov/region08/superfund/>

The November meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 1st in the Council Chambers at City Hall in Libby from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Agenda items include:

- a presentation by AFSDB on the process used and timing of the release of results, both individual and overall trends for Libby;
- a presentation by MSU of services available to the Libby;
- technical scientific aspect of EPA's investigations and cleanups.

The December meeting will be held on Thursday, December 14th in the Ponderosa Room at City Hall in Libby from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. If you have any questions about the CAC or EPA's action in

Call Wendy Thomi, 405-441-1150 x241 or Paul Donovan  
303-312-6808

Stop by the EPA Regional Office at the above address  
Monday - Friday



# Screening letters ring hospital phones

By RAY STOUT

Western News Reporter

People concerned with the results of their medical screening for asbestos related diseases should call the testing agency after they receive a letter before ringing their doctor, says the Libby hospital administrator.

The letters, from the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, were first sent out in a batch of about 125 during the first week in October. They're sent first to the patient's personal physicians to give them a heads-up about the patient.

The patient is sent their copy of the letter about a week later. And some have begun calling their doctors.

The letters in Libby are expected to peak at about 400 a week, said Rick Palagi, administrator and chief executive officer of St. John's Lutheran Hospital. And in this town, that's a lot to handle for the handful of doctors.

"This is a massive amount of contacts," Palagi said. "It's going to be a lot of work to follow up with these individuals and patients on the part of the hospital or the part of the doctors. You can imagine the logistics of having to go through those and having the dedication to go through those."

The screening is checking local people for asbestos-related diseases such as lung scarring, thickening of the lung lining, lung cancers and others due to

asbestos from a former vermiculite mine near Libby.

The diseases have hit miners, mill workers and Libby residents. There are no known cures for the illness brought by tremolite asbestos, a microscopic mineral fiber.

More than 6,000 people have been scheduled for the screenings, which began in July and are scheduled to end Nov. 2. Thursday is the last day for to register for an appointment.

The letters from ATSDR discuss the results of the three-part test: the chest X-rays, the breathing demonstration and the health-history interview. The

See Letters on Page 2

## Letters

Continued from Page 1

letters are being mailed about three months after the person is screened.

Palagi didn't know how many phone calls doctors were getting, but it's more than plenty, he said.

"We think it's going to be a fairly high number just because of human nature. We're anxious about the information that we got," Palagi said.

Some of the letters will mention the need for follow-up testing, he said. He didn't know what percentage.

"Our guess — our guess — at this time is that about 10 percent of the people that go through the screening process need to be contacted pretty quickly," Palagi said.

People found to have a potentially serious abnormality were contacted shortly after their test date, he said. Most of the letters coming

now are for the non-urgent cases.

Serving anxious people is what the hospital is working on, Palagi said.

"We're trying to be ready to talk to them," he said. "And we're hoping to do a coordinated effort. Let us get our coordination in place."

Involved in that effort will be the Libby-based Center for Asbestos-related Disease, or CARD clinic.

Before calling their doctor, Palagi said, letter recipients with questions or concerns should call the ATSDR number in the letter, (404) 639-6280. That's because the doctors may not have all the patient's information at the time, he said.

And don't worry too much if the letter indicates no problems, Palagi said.

"If they get this information and it sounds okay, then they should not be too anxious about it," he said.

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**Say**

**to the Test!**



**DON'T DELAY! October 20, 2000  
is the last day  
to make your appointment for  
FREE ASBESTOS MEDICAL TESTING**

**YOU...**

**Lived**

**Worked**

**Played, or**

**Went to school**

**in Libby, MT for at least 6 months prior to December 31, 1990**

**For information, call the  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)  
at 1-800-439-8308**

The asbestos medical testing program is part of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project sponsored by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on ATSDR or its role in this project, contact the headquarters in Atlanta, GA at 1-888-42-ATSDR.

**ATSDR**  
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

WESTERN NEWS OCT 29 00

# Federal health grant sought to fund Center for Asbestos Related Disease

By BRENT SHRUM

Western News Reporter

Hospital and county officials are ironing out the details of an application for a federal grant to help fund St. John's Lutheran Hospital's Center for Asbestos Related Disease for the next three years.

Funding would be provided by a Rural Health Outreach Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services. The application deadline is Monday, Oct. 16.

If the grant is approved, the money will be used to continue and expand services being provided by the Center for Asbestos Related Disease, which was established in July with funding from a \$250,000 grant from W.R. Grace to the hospital.

Grace has pledged \$250,000 per year, but St. John's chief executive officer Rick Palagi said there's no guarantee to how long the money will continue to come in. Grace's first \$250,000 payment was made last January, and the company has promised another \$250,000 this January, Palagi said.

"How many more Januaries after that, I have no idea," he said.

A \$249,000 annual budget has been established for the center. The

bulk of the funding is for personnel, including a \$100,000 salary for the center's director. The center is expected to bring in about \$50,000 per year in income from billable services.

Services currently being provided by the center include medical review of screening results, the dissemination of medical information to area health care providers and the community, adult immunizations, referrals to primary care physicians and specialists, and consultations with a Spokane-based pulmonologist.

With grant funding, the center would add ongoing psychosocial support groups, mental health evaluations and assessments, referrals for mental health treatment, and registered dieticians and physical therapists for educational programs.

It's not clear at this point how grant funds would be used in association with funding from Grace. If the grant is approved, it will be up to the hospital board to decide how to use the Grace money, said hospital board chair Kerry Beasley.

"Originally we only had \$250,000 and it was the choice of the board to fund this clinic for as

long as we could," Beasley said.

The true impact the results of recent health screenings will have on the community isn't known at this point, Beasley said.

Dr. Brad Black, who serves as county health officer and who would be the director of the center, said it's still not known if the center will be a part-time or full time operation. More will be known in another year, Black said.

"My thought was, we'd better go for whatever money was available," he said.

The Rural Health Outreach Grant would provide funding for three years. A typical award is \$170,000 to \$180,000, Palagi said.

The Center for Asbestos Related Disease uses an advisory board made up of members of the hospital board, clinic staff, asbestos victims and members of the Community Advisory Group established by the Environmental Protection Agency. If the grant is received, a representative of the county would be added. A governing board would be established to include representatives from the county, the hospital and the Western Montana Mental Health Center.



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**at 1-800-438-8308**

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**ATSDR**  
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

OCT 13, 00

WESTERN NEWS



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**ATSDR**  
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

Western News OCT 11, 2000



## ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers  
about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

Western News OCT 11, 2000

**Q:** I don't have vermiculite in my house but I have other kinds of insulation in my home which may contain asbestos. Do asbestos fibers of asbestos put me at risk?

**A:** If the insulation does not contain asbestos, then there is no threat of harm from asbestos-related illnesses from exposure to it. However, many types of insulation can be irritating to the skin, nose, throat and lungs.

One sure way to find out about the asbestos content is to have insulation samples collected by a state-accredited inspector and have the samples analyzed at an accredited testing laboratory.

If it contains asbestos but is in good condition, left undisturbed, it may not be a problem. For asbestos to present a problem for the homeowner, it must be disturbed so that tiny fibers are released into the air and inhaled or ingested.

As insulation gets older, it may deteriorate through normal wear and tear. A kind of tiny airborne fibers that are of concern. If you think it is necessary, insulation may be getting into your living space, then please contact a professional expert to have it evaluated and perhaps removed.

In the long term, it is better for a professional to replace old asbestos insulation with more modern insulation. However, containment options such as encapsulation with a sealant or enclosure with sheet rock may be options to delay the expense.

There are specialized firms that are certified in removing asbestos safely. You can locate these firms through your state or county health department.

For more information or a list of accredited inspectors and asbestos abatement specialists call:

John Podolinsky or Pierre Annucci, MDEQ at 406-477-3290

More information can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEW/Asbestosinsulation2.html>

<http://www.deq.state.mt.us/Asb-Cont/6201List.htm>

The Western News, Libby, MT., Wednesday, October 11, 2000-3

## Deadline nears for medical screening

Libby area residents have until Oct. 20 to schedule an appointment for free asbestos medical testing.

To determine eligibility, residents may call 1-800-439-8308.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which began the medical testing program on July 5, has tested over 4,500 people to date with over 1,000 more scheduled to participate. The last day for the medical testing is anticipated to be Nov. 2. The medical testing program is to evaluate the current health status of people who were present in Libby during the period of highest exposure to asbestos, a by-product of vermiculite mined and processed in the area.

The program includes: a face-to-face interview; chest X-rays and lung function tests. Test results are sent to participants approximately 3 months after testing.

To be eligible for medical testing, a person must fit one of the two criteria:

- Lived, worked, or played in Libby for at least 6 months before Dec. 31, 1990 or

- Be a former employee of the W.R. Grace/Zonolite company in the Libby area or a household member of a former employee.

The medical testing program was initiated as a service to the community as part of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project, a coop-

erative effort between ATSDR, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department.

ATSDR is a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR is responsible for preventing or reducing the harmful effects of exposure to hazardous substances on human health and quality of life.

For more about the medical testing program, call the ATSDR office in Libby at (406) 293-7731 ext. 279.

## EPA calls meeting, plans cleanup in Minneapolis

The federal Environmental Protection Agency is planning a cleanup operation in a Minneapolis neighborhood near a former plant for processing vermiculite mined near Libby.

This is the first cleanup in a residential neighborhood near a vermiculite processing plant in the nation.

The EPA has scheduled a public meeting in Minneapolis on Oct. 11 to outline the plan for cleanup of asbestos-contaminated soil outside homes near the former Western

Mineral Products vermiculite processing plant.

The cleanup is scheduled to begin on Oct. 11, starting with alleys in the Logan Park neighborhood.

Based on previous sampling and neighborhood interviews, the cleanup will be limited to alleys and yards. Between 25 to 30 parcels of land in Logan Park have been identified as needing some cleanup. The yard cleanups will begin after the alley work is completed.

Vermiculite ore from the Libby

mine was shipped to Minneapolis and to about 300 other facilities across the country to be processed. Under the Superfund waste cleanup program, EPA is assessing all sites to determine whether workers or the public are still being exposed to vermiculite.

The EPA will be working from a construction trailer near the Minneapolis site. The information phone number, to be in operation weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., is 612-706-0615.



**Say**

**to the Test!**



**DON'T DELAY! October 20, 2000**

**is the last day**

**to make your appointment for**

**FREE ASBESTOS MEDICAL TESTING**

**YOU...**

**Lived**

**Worked**

**Played, or**

**Went to school**

**in Libby, MT for at least 6 months prior to December 31, 1991**

**For information, call the**

**Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)**

**at 1-800-438-8305**

The asbestos medical testing program is part of the Libby Community Environmental Health Protection Act, authorized by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on ATSDR or its role in this project, contact the headquarters in Atlanta, GA at 1-888-42-ATSDR.

**ATSDR**  
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

**WESTERN NEWS**      **OCT 6, 00**

## Industrial park sale to Grace falls through

W.R. Grace has rescinded its offer to buy back the city industrial park, Councilman Dan Stephens announced at Monday night's Libby City Council meeting.

The company is no longer interested in the deal, Stephens said.

"Per a phone call to Alan Stringer, this is a closed matter," he said.

The industrial park is the former site of Grace's vermiculite expansion plant. Grace is cleaning the property of asbestos contamination under an order from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The order requires the buildings on the site to be either cleaned or demolished and replaced. Two of the buildings have been cleaned and work on a third is nearly finished,

Councilman Joe Johnston said Monday.

Grace had offered \$200,000 for the property, Stephens said. The city countered with a request for \$300,000, a clause to free the city from any legal liability associated with the property, and requirements that Grace clean the property to EPA specifications and find a permanent home for industrial park tenant Millwork West.

"W.R. Grace came back with 'no longer interested,'" Stephens said.

In other business, Council:

○ Voted to write a letter to Grace asking that the company give the EPA access to the former vermiculite mine site for disposal of asbestos-contaminated materials from the screening plant cleanup.

Located at the mouth of Rainy Creek, the screening plant is being cleaned by the EPA. If Grace does not grant access, the contaminated materials will be transported to Spokane for disposal.

The city voted to write the letter

at the request of the Community Advisory Group on asbestos issues.

○ Received an update on a request from St. John's Lutheran Hospital for the permanent closure of a block of Fourth Street for use as a parking area.

The city is seeking a site drawing and full documentation on the request, Stephens said. The hospital has also been asked to canvass the neighborhood to gauge public sentiment on the proposal, Stephens said.



## ASK EPA!!

### Questions and Answers

### about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: Will EPA have pamphlets warning homeowners and buyers of the possible hazard of living in a home with vermiculite insulation?**

**A:** At this point, we do not have enough information showing that just having vermiculite in your home as insulation is dangerous enough for us to issue any national public health warning about vermiculite. However, we are working hard to determine possible risks posed by having asbestos-containing insulation in one's home or in the garden.

Currently, EPA is working on two major activities to better understand the risks from non-occupational exposure to the vermiculite mined in Libby.

1) EPA is revising the risk-assessment methodology to include consideration of the type of asbestos (chrysotile vs. tremolite), the length of the asbestos fibers, and the length to width ratio of the fibers. These factors will help scientists determine people's risk of being around even small amounts of tremolite asbestos.

2) EPA is also working on getting new types of analytical techniques approved so that the type, amount and size of asbestos found in a given home can be more accurately measured.

EPA has tested vermiculite products on a national level (including commercially-available insulation). This information was shared with the Consumer Products Safety Commission. The results of the investigation indicate that the potential exposure to asbestos from some vermiculite products poses only a minimal health risk to consumers.

The risk from having an abundance of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in your home remains unclear.

For more information call: Wendy Thomi at 406-441-1150 ext 241.

WESTERN NEWS

OCT 4, 2000

## Notice of Public Meeting

Notice is hereby given that a public meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 7, 2001, at 7:00 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall.

The purpose of the meeting shall be the consideration by the Board of Lincoln County Commissioners to adopt the following resolution.

At the meeting the Board of Commissioners will accept public comment on this resolution. Comments can also be sent to the Board of County Commissioners, 512 California Avenue, Libby, MT 59923 or e-mailed to lcomms@libby.org. For further information or for a copy of the draft resolution please contact Bill Bischoff, Executive Assistant at (406) 293-7781, ext. 201 or e-mail billb@libby.org

\*\*\*\*\*  
RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF LINCOLN COUNTY, MONTANA TO COMMENCE BEFORE THE BOARD A PROCEEDING TO INVESTIGATE: (1) THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF ANY ADVERSE IMPACTS ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY, OR THE ENVIRONMENT, AND ON THE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPUTATION OF THE COMMUNITY IN LINCOLN COUNTY THAT MAY BE PRESENTED BY OR THAT MAY HAVE ARISEN OR MAY BE ARISING FROM THE CONTAMINATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT WITH TREMOLITE ASBESTOS IN AND AROUND THE CITY OF LIBBY; (2) THE NEED, IF ANY, FOR LEGISLATIVE OR EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENTAL ACTION AT THE COUNTY LEVEL TO ABATE ANY ENDANGERMENTS THAT MAY BE PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY, OR THE ENVIRONMENT ARISING OUT OF SUCH CONTAMINATION; (3) THE AVAILABLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF PARTIES WHO ARE OR MAY BE LIABLE FOR

THE COST OF ANY ACTIONS THAT MAY BE NECESSARY TO ABATE THE ADVERSE IMPACTS, IF ANY, OF SUCH CONTAMINATION ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, SAFETY OR THE ENVIRONMENT; AND (4) THE NEED FOR THE COUNTY TO SEEK LEGISLATIVE OR EXECUTIVE ACTION AT THE STATE OR FEDERAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO APPROPRIATELY RESPOND, EITHER ALONE OR IN CONJUNCTION WITH COUNTY ACTION, TO ANY SUCH ENDANGERMENTS THAT MAY BE PRESENTED.

**WHEREAS**, the mining of vermiculite has been conducted in Lincoln County for more than 70 years; and

**WHEREAS**, vermiculite has been processed in various locations in and around the City of Libby in Lincoln County; and

**WHEREAS**, tremolite asbestos is known to be present in and around ore containing vermiculite; and

**WHEREAS**, a significant number of individuals in Lincoln County have been exposed to asbestiform fibers and have contracted asbestos related diseases including asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma; and

**WHEREAS**, the number of cases of asbestos related diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma in a community of the size of Lincoln County was sufficiently large to gain the attention of state and federal governmental agencies responsible for the protection of the environment and the assessment of and development of data bases about adverse impacts on the public health from released hazardous substances; and

**WHEREAS**, in response to concerns over the causes of the significant number of cases of asbestos related diseases in Lincoln County, the United States Environmental Protection Agency ("USEPA") and the Agency for Toxic Substances

Disease Registry ("ATSDR") of the U.S. Public Health Service, and their various environmental consultants have conducted investigations of certain sites and populations in and around Lincoln County where vermiculite was mined and processed; and

**WHEREAS**, in the performance of these investigations, the presence of tremolite asbestos has been detected at levels that the USEPA determined present a significant threat to the public health welfare and the environment in and around the City of Libby in Lincoln County; and

**WHEREAS**, in an effort to mitigate the most prominent threats to public health, the USEPA has undertaken, and continues to pursue, the remediation and removal of tremolite asbestos contamination from areas in and around certain historic, processing facilities within Lincoln County; and

**WHEREAS**, the ATSDR has studied, and continues to study and assess, the nature and extent of the impacts of both occupational and non-occupational exposure to tremolite asbestos on public health in Lincoln County; and

**WHEREAS**, as a result of these investigations, the impacts of tremolite asbestos contamination on public health within the County include a mortality rate related to the presence of tremolite asbestos in the community in excess of 6000% of the levels that would be found in communities unaffected by the presence of tremolite asbestos; and

**WHEREAS**, as a result of these investigations and the discovery of the tremolite asbestos contamination and its toxicity, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has grown increasingly concerned about assuring the adequate protection of public health, safety, welfare,

the environment and natural resources within the jurisdiction of Lincoln County from any adverse impacts that have been or may continue to be presented by, or arise out of exposure to, the tremolite asbestos contamination, and the preservation and restoration of the economic vitality of Lincoln County derived from its historic attractiveness as a recreational area and its previous reputation as a healthful residential, commercial and industrial area; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County has further become increasingly aware of the inherent limitations on the scope of the governmental response that USEPA and ATSDR can provide under current federal law; and

**WHEREAS**, Article II, Section 3 of the Montana Constitution expressly provides that all persons in Montana have an inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment, which right the Montana Supreme Court in *Montana Environmental Information Center v. Department of Environmental Quality*, 296 Montana 207, 988 P.2d 1236 (1999) has determined to be a fundamental constitutional right of all Montanans and a self-executing provision of the Montana Constitution; and

**WHEREAS**, Article XI, Section 4 of the Montana Constitution vests county government with legislative, administrative and other powers provided or implied by law, and

**WHEREAS**, it is the inherent authority, fundamental responsibility, and necessary and proper affair of county government to secure, in compliance with such limitations and restrictions as may be prescribed by law, adequate protection of the public health, safety, welfare and the environment of its inhabitants, as well as to take such actions as are per-

mitted by law to protect the fundamental, inalienable rights afforded by the Montana Constitution;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County does hereby establish a legislative proceeding before the Board of Commissioners for Lincoln County to investigate the adequacy of existing environmental remedial programs and authorities and to take such action, including legislation at the county level and recommendations to the appropriate state or federal legislative body, as the Board of Commissioners, following consideration of the results of this investigation and input from the public, may deem appropriate;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, in light of the extensive public health issues arising from the presence of tremolite asbestos contamination in and around certain parts of Lincoln County, and pursuant to the provisions of Article XI, Section 7(1) of the Montana Constitution, the Board of Commissioners hereby requests that the Lincoln County Board of Health attend to and participate in, as appropriate, the investigation to the conducted by the Board of Commissioners pursuant to this Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that it is necessary and appropriate to the affairs of the county that the scope of the investigation include but not be limited to the nature and source of any tremolite asbestos contamination in and around Lincoln County, potential sources of releases of the tremolite asbestos contamination, potential methods to finance the abatement, if needed, of the contamination, the adequacy and sufficiency of enforcement programs

and authorities at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of regulatory programs at the county, state and federal levels, the adequacy and sufficiency of liability provisions and financial responsibility requirements at the county, state and federal levels, and the assessment of the adequacy, sufficiency, and limitations of financial resources of those parties who are or may be liable for abating the adverse impacts arising out of the tremolite asbestos contamination, including without limitation, liability insurance and other mechanisms in the private and commercial sector of the community;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, in order to assist the Board of Commissioners in the conduct of its investigation, the Public Health Unit of the County Attorney's office will provide all necessary and appropriate legal support services to the County Board of Commissioners.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, in order to further the purposes of this investigation, the members of the County Board of Health may request that the County Board of Commissioners issue subpoenas requiring attendance of witnesses or production of books or other documents for evidence or testimony in any action or proceeding pending before the County Board of Commissioners.

### DATED:

I hereby certify that Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_ was passed and adopted by the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners in a regular meeting held February, 2001.

To comment on this resolution, contact your county commissioner at 293-7781.

Published in The Montanian, Feb. 21, 28, 2001

Feb 28, 01

MONTANIAN



**CAG from page 1**  
**Audience Member Question -** Instead of doing the injections and withdrawals inside the lung, can't you just use sputum?  
**Answer -** No. We need a sample inside the lung.

**Comment by Dr. Black -** The lung sampling is very important to understanding the disease, and I hope people will volunteer to be tested.

**CAG Member Comment -** You spoke of studying the disease to possibility arrest it. This is our first ray of hope.  
**Response -** The disease begins at the molecular level and is manifested at the organ level. Only a handful of investigations are taking place at the molecular level.

#### **Draft Health Benefit Plan for Libby Asbestos Exposure**

Rick Palagi spoke on behalf of the Medical Trust Subcommittee which includes Kerry Beasley, Sandy Wagner, Leroy Thom, Gayla Benefield, Cyrus Lee, Carrie Dedrick, and John Rider. He stated that the draft plan, which was passed out at the January 25, 2001 CAG meeting, was prepared by Intermountain Administrators under the direction of the subcommittee. Mr. Palagi stated that the draft plan's most important provisions are on pages 14 which addresses eligibility and 18-29 which address coverage. He then asked for questions and comments from CAG members and the audience. A summary of the questions and comments follows.

**CAG Member Question -** What is the significance of the material that is highlighted in the plan?

**Answer -** The highlighted words are changes made to an earlier draft.

**CAG Member Question -** Would the plan be administered locally?

**Answer -** It is assumed that the plan administrator would be a local body.

**CAG Member Question -** Is it the intent to cover people under this plan who were exposed to asbestos elsewhere, or just in Libby?

**Answer -** The intent of the plan is to cover people who were exposed here.

**CAG Member Question -** Would the plan provide coverage for people who were exposed here, but have moved away?

**Answer -** Yes. The plan provides that eligible people can receive treatment where they live, or if necessary receive funding so they can travel for treatment.

**CAG Member Question -** If auto-immune system diseases are determined at a later date to be caused by asbestos exposure, would they be covered?

**Answer -** Coverage is provided for asbestos-related disease as determined by the local physician. Ultimate decision making authority rests with the plan administrator.

**CAG Member Question -** Page 4 of the draft plan specifies a set monetary coverage limits. Would these change over time?

**Answer -** The plan administrator can change the coverage limits as necessary.

**CAG Member -** The documentation required on page 14 should be clarified.

**CAG Member Question -** How will the plan be funded, and what happens if W.R. Grace declares bankruptcy?

**Answer -** We need a further discussion about funding options to pursue. The obvious sources would be W.R. Grace, Congressional appropriation, and private philanthropy. We hope to accumulate a large enough principle that annual plan expenses would come from interest on the principle.

**CAG Member Comment -** The better the plan, the easier it will be to fund.

Rick Palagi closed this topic for this meeting by inviting further questions and comments on the draft plan to any member of the Medical Trust Subcommittee. Mr. Mueller committed to including a discussion of the draft plan and funding ideas at the March 8 CAG meeting.

#### **Funding Request for Insulation Removal**

Sandy Wagner read a draft letter prepared by the subcommittee which included herself, Dr. Black, Don Wilkins, Kerry Beasley, and George Bauer. She stated that the letter would sent to the Secretaries of the US Departments of Health and Human Services, Interior, and Labor, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Governor Martz, Senators Baucus and Burns, and Congressman Rehberg.

**CAG Action -** The CAG voted unanimously in favor of a seconded motion to send the seven letters, and seven signature pages, one for each letter, were passed around during the meeting so CAG members could sign them.

#### **TOSC Subcommittee Report**

Rick Palagi reported on behalf of the TOSC Subcommittee which included himself, George Keck, Kirby Maki, Don Wilkins, and Clinton Maynard. After meeting with Kevin Mellot, Assistant Project Manager for Technical Outreach Services for Communities (TOSC) at Montana Tech, the Subcommittee proposed that the CAG request the following five services from TOSC:

1. Conduct a needs assessment of CAG members individually to identify questions of concern, suggested areas needing further research and educational programs.
2. Determine the baseline understanding of:
  - a. The role and scope of EPA's work in Libby;
  - b. The role and scope of ATSDR's work in Libby; and

c. Asbestos related disease.

3. Research the advantages and disadvantages of superfund designation and make a recommendation concerning it to the CAG.
4. Determine the role of TOSC that would be most beneficial.
5. Prepare an action plan for utilizing TOSC services.

**CAG Action -** The CAG unanimously approved a seconded motion in favor of this five-fold request, and asked that the TOSC Subcommittee continue to work with Mr. Mellot to oversee TOSC's actions. Rick Palagi asked to be excused from the Subcommittee, and George Bauer volunteered to take his place.

#### **EPA Report**

Duc Nguyen, EPA On-Scene Coordinator, reported that Paul Peronard could not attend this meeting because of a training session.

#### **Minneapolis Cleanups**

In response to questions at the last CAG meeting, Mr. Nguyen determined that EPA has not removed any attic insulation at its cleanup site in Minneapolis. Twenty-one properties at the site have been cleaned, but only removal of contaminated soils from gardens and driveways has occurred. Twenty additional properties will be similarly addressed.

#### **Phase 2 of the Residential Sampling**

Mr. Peronard and Chris Weis will be in Libby in two weeks to conduct interviews to identify twelve homes for phase two of the residential sampling. Three types of sampling will occur. In some of the homes, routine household activities will be monitored during a two to three day period. Air quality will be monitored through a personal air pump worn by a person in the house during routine activities and through a stationary pump in the living area. In other homes, air quality during major cleaning activities will be monitored. Finally, in some of the homes, simulated remodeling activities conducted by EPA personnel or its contractor will be monitored. In the latter, activities such as wiring changes or installation of a ceiling fan will be simulated in one home without and two with asbestos-contaminated ceiling insulation. In these homes, three hours of air monitoring will be conducted prior to the simulated activities, and three hours of monitoring will follow the activities to ensure that no contamination remains after the simulation. Air monitoring of garden rototilling will occur in August when conditions are expected to be dry.

**CAG Member Question -** If homes are found to have excessive concentrations of asbestos, will the residents will be allowed to reoccupy them?

**Answer -** No one can return to their homes until EPA determines them to be safe. That is the purpose of the post sampling air monitoring. EPA will relocate people if their homes are determined to be unsafe.

**CAG Member Question -** How long will it take to get the results of the air monitoring so that EPA will know whether the home is safe to occupy?

**Answer -** EPA will have a mobile lab on site; eight to twelve hours will be required.

**CAG Member Question -** What homes can qualify for the phase 2 sampling?

**Answer -** Homes tested before, and a mix of homes with and without vermiculite insulation will qualify.

**CAG Member Question -** What will happen if the three hour pre- or post-simulation monitoring finds asbestos concentrations above EPA's action levels?

**Answer -** EPA will look at relocation until the houses are cleaned up. (Paul Peronard will clarify this issue at the next CAG meeting.)

#### **Access Mediation**

Mr. Nguyen reported that the court ordered mediation between EPA and W.R. Grace concerning access to the mine for disposal of asbestos-contaminated materials was not successful, so the case has gone back to Judge Malloy for a ruling. The timing of that ruling is not known.

#### **Maki Letter**

Kirby Maki read a memo he is sending to EPA. (This letter was published Feb. 14 in The Montanian) The memo informs EPA that running tracks at both the high school and middle school were surfaced in the past with vermiculite contaminated with asbestos. After eight years of use, W.R. Grace notified the school district of the contamination and recommended that the track surface be removed or encapsulated. The high school track was then encapsulated, and the middle school surface was removed and replaced with uncontaminated materials. In his letter, Mr. Maki requests that EPA conduct tests at the two tracks and then develop and implement a plan for removing any contaminated material and back filling under them with clean material. The high school track surface should be replaced with an all-weather surface. He also asked that EPA assess the effects of children running on the tracks during the eight year period in which the surface was contaminated.

**CAG Member Question -** Will EPA clean up the two track sites?

**Answer -** EPA is constructing the budget for this year's cleanup activities. We will add to it funds to determine the human health exposure at these sites.

**CAG Member Comment -** The risk assess-

ment is supposed to be completed by this summer, but you will not sample gardens until August. I am confused about the timing.

**Response -** The timing of the risk assessment is controlled in part by the need to peer review the assessment methodology. Once it is approved, we should be able to apply it to the results of the garden sampling to determine what actions, if any, should be taken regarding the gardens. (Chris Weis will clarify timing of the risk assessment at the next meeting.)

**CAG Member Question -** Who acknowledged back in 1982 that the school tracks posed a health risk?

**Answer -** A 1982 internal W.R. Grace memo acknowledged the risk.

**CAG Member Question -** Did Lincoln County encapsulate the high school track by paving it?

**Answer -** Yes.

**CAG Member Question -** Did the County know that the track was contaminated before paving it?

**Answer -** Yes.

**CAG Member Comment -** In EPA's Minneapolis cleanup, stoner rock was found to be highly concentrated with asbestos. I have talked with a former worker at the screening plant, and stoner rock was not separated from vermiculite insulation used in Libby homes. EPA should not, therefore, sample only the top of attic insulation. The heavier stoner rock may have settled, and EPA should take samples to account for this fact.

**Response -** Thank you for this information. EPA will take it into account.

#### **ATSDR Report**

Dan Strausbaugh, Montana Representative of ATSDR, reported that this week 881 letters explaining medical screening results will be mailed tomorrow. Another 1,000 will be mailed February 26 or 28. By the end of the month, some 4,000 letters will have been mailed. Mr. Strausbaugh reported that ATSDR has released for public comment, a document reviewing the scientific literature describing the relationship between exposure to tremolite-related asbestos and resultant health effects. He made available some copies of the document and announced that copies are available at the EPA Information Center in Libby. Comments can be provided to local ATSDR staff who will then forward them to

ATSDR's Atlanta headquarters. Mr. Strausbaugh also stated that Dr. Lybarger will be reporting next week to Montana's Congressional delegation the preliminary analysis of the medical screening results. Dr. Lybarger will then present this same information to the CAG at its February 22, 2001 meeting. The results presented to the Congressional delegation will be embargoed, meaning that they will not be released publicly until the CAG meeting. Finally, concerning the American Public Health Association meeting in October in Atlanta, Mr. Strausbaugh said that he forwarded the CAG's recommendation that a panel of people from Libby be invited to present the situation regarding the asbestos exposure in Libby. However, his agency did not accept it, and asks instead that the CAG recommend one person to attend the meeting and present the Libby situation. The CAG decided to take up this request at a future meeting.

#### **Lincoln County Report**

Commissioner Rita Windom passed out to the CAG and audience, a copy of a draft ordinance concerning the asbestos situation. She described the draft ordinance as complex and comprehensive. The County will publish the draft officially in the Tobacco Valley News on February 15, and will publish it two weeks later in the other local newspapers. The County will hold a public meeting on the draft ordinance on March 7 at a time and place to be announced. It will likely take action on the draft at this meeting after receiving the public comments. Ms. Windom stated that questions or comments from CAG members can be provided to the Commission.

**CAG Member Question -** What happens after the ordinance is approved?

**Answer -** If the ordinance is approved the formal investigation it calls for will begin.

**CAG Member Question -** Will the options include a criminal investigation?

**Answer -** Not in the beginning phase. Whether criminal investigations occur depends on what is learned during the formal investigation and on action by the State of Montana.

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 22, 2001 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room of the Libby City Hall. The agenda will include, as well as the normal agency reports, a report by ATSDR's Dr. Lybarger on the preliminary results of the medical screening.



## Dear Mr. Mayor: Please resign

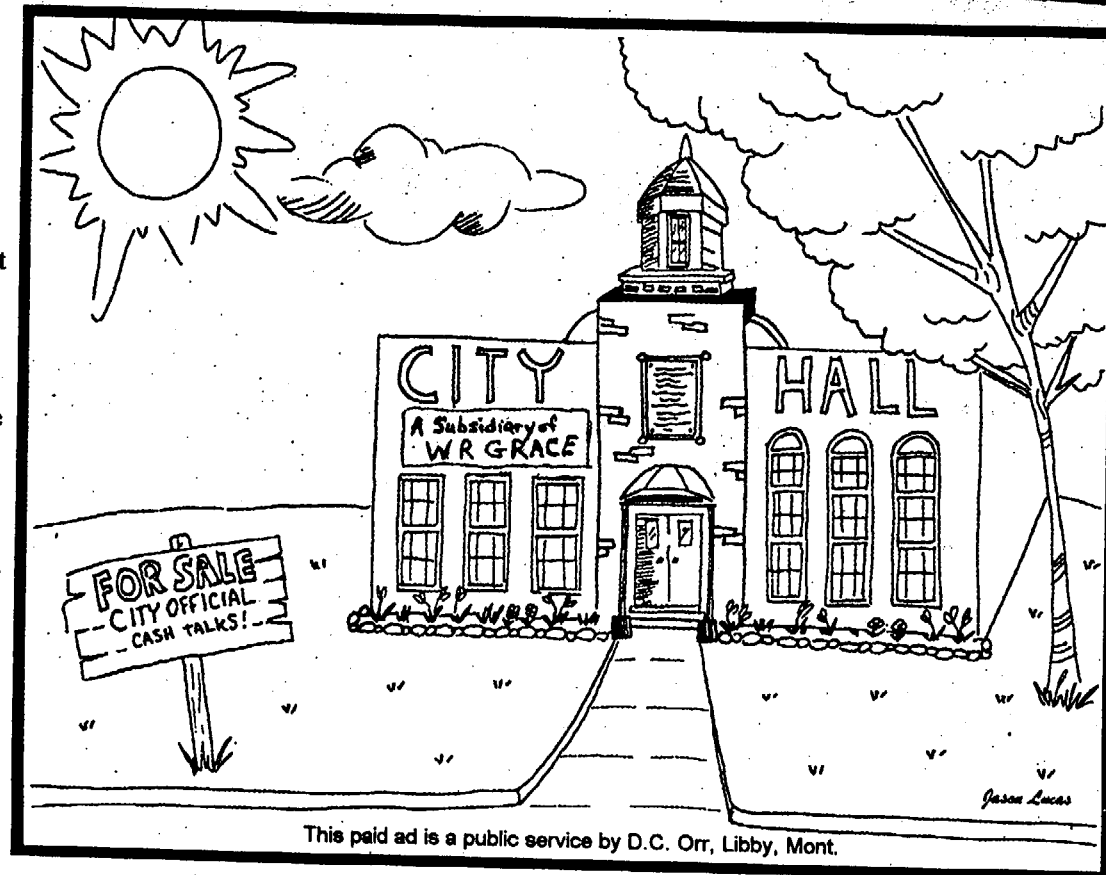
Editor:

I'll be asking the mayor of Libby to resign at the next council meeting. This is not something I approach lightly. It breaks my heart that it has come to this, but it is necessary before this town can move forward in the asbestos issue.

Don't get caught up in the building debate, it is a secondary issue. What is important here is the leadership of this town. We need civic leaders who are going to look out for the rights of their constituents. That is the function of government. Anyone with asbestos in their homes, schools, businesses, or in their lungs is learning how difficult it is to protect your rights. We are just learning how poorly we did this in the past. Our mayor is heavily involved in these issues. Accepting any gratuity from W.R. Grace raises some serious questions.

Is the mayor representing his constituents or W.R. Grace when he takes action at City Hall, with the LADC, at CAG meetings, or in negotiations with the county?

I have watched the mayor relinquish the gavel time after time in recent months whenever a conflict of interest arose. Whenever a situation comes up where he has profited from the actions of council we



This paid ad is a public service by D.C. Orr, Libby, Mont.

are left without a mayor in charge. The mayor has rendered his office ineffective with his backroom deals. This doesn't affect just city residents now. It affects anyone who has been touched by the asbestos issue. That is a large group. If you are uncomfortable with

this cozy relationship between Grace and our civic leadership, come to the next council meeting. We need to deal with this before it infests every facet of our local government. Judging from the show of support in a recent letter to the editor, the mayor is forming his alli-

ances. I still believe the people of this town prefer to shape our own destiny. You only retain the rights you are willing to fight and keep.

**DC Orr, Libby**

10 28 Feb 23, 01  
MONTANA  
LIBBY

# Screening finds widespread asbestos exposure

## *30 percent of people screened show some effects*

By David F. Latham  
editor of The Montanian

Past exposure to asbestos from a former vermiculite mine is producing signs of disease among a very high percentage of Libby residents, according to preliminary results of a medical screening conducted by the federal government.

The preliminary results of the screening shows potential lung disease among 30 percent of the people tested, far worse than had been expected. Health officials had initially estimated that 10 to 15 percent of those tested would show lung abnormalities.

The results were presented at a Community Advisory Group meeting Feb. 22 in Libby. The screening was conducted by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in response to reports of widespread illness and death from asbestos contamination linked to the former W. R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine near Libby.

"I said it was going to be bad, but this is off the scale," said Paul Peronard, on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency overseeing the clean-up of asbestos contamination in Libby.

"The question to ask is, not 'who is affected?' but, 'who isn't affected? Who is safe? Every single person in Libby is in a risk group. It's much worse than anyone thought," Peronard said.

The exposure occurred for decades until 1990, when Grace closed

the vermiculite mine seven miles from Libby it had owned since 1963. Before that time the mine was owned by Zonolite Co., which began operating in the 1920s.

Air quality samples taken regularly since November, 1999, show that there is now no significant asbestos pollution in Libby.

While it was not necessarily surprising that 50 percent of miners who participated in the screening showed signs of lung scarring, it was shocking, Peronard said, that up to 25 percent of persons with no ties to the mine also showed health problems.

The study says that "no directly comparable Montana or U.S. population studies are available" to show how Libby's exposure rate compares to other places, but based on "studies of differing groups within the United States believed to have no substantive work-related asbestos exposures," the rate of non-occupational exposure in Libby is between 16 times and 1,500 times higher.

"These are drastic numbers," Peronard said. "In so many ways, they're just off the chart."

"Those are concerning numbers," agreed Dr. Jeffrey Lybarger, author of the report. "We'll be watching that very closely and following up with further testing." Lybarger is a physician with ATSDR, which worked with other federal, state and local departments to test past and present Libby-area residents.

Between July and November,

2000, 6,144 people participated in the health testing program. Lybarger emphasized repeatedly that the study results are preliminary and cover only 1,078 participants, or 18 percent of the total number screened. But if the preliminary rate of exposure were to apply to the entire study group, that would mean that 1,843 of the persons tested will show lung abnormalities.

Peronard said that even in the unlikely event that the remaining 82 percent of study participants show no asbestos exposure whatsoever, Libby's general population still remains well above national averages in frequency of asbestos-related health problems.

For 27 years, W.R. Grace & Co. operated the mine, which released deadly tremolite asbestos as vermiculite was dug up and processed. Vermiculite was used in construction as insulation.

According to Lybarger, physicians fully expected to see heightened levels of asbestos-related health problems in those who worked at the mine or who lived with Grace employees, but they did not expect to see that many cases among persons with no connection to the mine.

In addition to the 50 percent of former W.R. Grace employees who have asbestos-related problems, scarring of the lungs also was found in about 29 percent of persons who lived with the miners. Family members are thought to have been affected when workers

brought the asbestos dust home on their clothes.

Scarring is caused by inhaling the long, needle-like fibers that lodge in the lungs, which over time cause diseases like asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer. Asbestos disease has a latency period of about 20 years.

Twenty-one percent of persons with vermiculite insulation in their homes also had abnormalities identified by at least one of three physicians involved in the screening, as did 25 percent of those who recreated near the mine and its tailings. Even the group reporting no known exposure to vermiculite showed a 27 percent rate of lung scarring.

The percentage of participants who exhibited lung scarring visible on the chest x-ray by one specialist is an indicator of the number of people who will need long-term evaluation, Lybarger said. Those whose x-rays had scarring seen by two specialists represent a better estimate of those who'll likely be diagnosed with asbestos-related disease.

Because those reporting no known exposure to asbestos are so few in number — 53 out of 1,078 — and the rate of health problems is so much higher in the majority who did report historic exposure, Libby can expect many, many more cases of asbestos-related health problems. In other words, most of the town was exposed, and as many as one-third of those exposed show lung abnor-

malities, which means the town's medical infrastructure will need to be expanded to deal with the wave of patients.

According to Lybarger, discovery of a health problem does not necessarily indicate the individual will become terminally ill with asbestosis or other asbestos-related diseases. Instead, he said, it merely indicates that exposure has occurred and that it warrants further monitoring.

By catching the signs early, Lybarger said, doctors hope to prevent patients from progressing into more advanced stages of asbestos disease. In addition, he said, the study will help public health officials plan for future medical needs in the community.

A separate ATSDR study released in December, 2000, showed that between 1979 and 1998, Libby residents died of asbestos-related disease 60 times more frequently than the national average.

Children under 18, who accounted for 15 percent of the first test group, didn't receive chest x-rays and no data is available yet on how many children showed signs of asbestos disease, Lybarger said. An age-group breakdown will be available when results of all 6,144 participants are studied.

Lybarger said the final ATSDR report including information on all 6,144 participants will be published "some time this summer."

MONTANIAN

Feb 28, 01

## Officials explain Millwork West deal

(This letter is in response to D.C. Orr's letter Feb. 14 in *The Montanian*)  
Editor:

This narrative details the sequence of events that led up to the relocation of Millwork West to the property owned by Universal Land [owned by Libby Mayor Tony Berget].

When Paul Peronard of the EPA informed Mel Burnett and the City of Libby that Millwork West would have to be relocated, Mel indicated that he was interested in being in the old Frontier Glass location on California Ave. The city called the owners of this property to see if it could be rented or leased. We were told they would not lease the building. Alan Stringer and Paul Peronard each called them to see about leasing, they also told them no. The thought had been to put the retail business in the Frontier Glass building and W.R. Grace would provide a storage building on the old baseball fields.

Jim Stout told the city they were looking at a sprung [sic] structure which the city would be able to keep after the clean-up was complete.

The city and W.R. Grace next looked at putting the sprung [sic] structure and the whole business on

the baseball fields at the city industrial park (which the EPA had determined was clean). The EPA determined that this setup would not work because there would be some risk to customers and truck traffic. Although some on the council didn't want the sprung [sic] structure, most did.

Next the city looked at putting the sprung [sic] structure on the big grassy area in front of City Hall. Mark Fennessy, city attorney, informed the council that the property had restrictions placed on it at the time Stimson donated the property to the city. The restriction would not allow for a retail business to be located on the property. The mayor then offered to trade property with the city so that the sprung [sic] structure could still be located on city property. The city attorney said that the traded land would then become restricted in the same manner as the city property.

At this point, W.R. Grace and Millwork West had decided to put up two metal buildings instead of the sprung [sic] structure. The city considered putting the buildings down by the Legion baseball fields but the city ran into a multitude of problems with this site.

First, the city met resistance from

the neighbors. According to city attorney Mark Fennessy there were land restrictions on part of the property. There were waterline concerns, parking concerns for the Legion baseball field. Also the size of the first building would have to be smaller than originally conceived because of the size of the power company easement, the size of the second building would also have to be down-sized to allow for fire department access behind the building; and finally, it was determined the largest building would be placed over a large sewer line. It did not seem feasible to meet all of Millwork West's needs and still meet property restraints.

The next scenario was to trade property adjacent to Asa Wood [School] with the property next to Town Pump. It was thought that Town Pump could buy the property and trade with W.R. Grace. Grace staff did not feel there was sufficient time to pursue this complicated course of action.

Because the mayor thought it would be preferable if a public entity could benefit from having the buildings built on public property, he asked [Libby Public Schools Superintendent] Kirby Maki if the school district had property that would work for this purpose. Mr. Maki could not think of any.

[Lincoln County commissioner] Rita Windom was then asked if the county had property that would work for this purpose. Rita suggested the county park across the river. Mel Burnett didn't feel it would work very well for them, and Mrs. Windom couldn't think of anything else that might work.

The city at this point could not come up with anything and informed W.R. Grace and Millwork West that they would have to pursue private property on which to relocate the business. W.R. Grace and Millwork West then looked at other properties including property on the other side of the river owned by Mark Owen near the county shop and the old Libby Ready Mix location to name a few.

Signed:

Thomas Wood, Libby Fire Chief  
Bill Watt, Libby Fire Marshal  
Paul Peronard, EPA  
Alan Stringer, W.R. Grace  
Dan Stephens, Libby City Council  
Mel Burnett, Millwork West, Inc.  
George Bauer, Libby City Council  
Judy Porter, Libby City Council  
Jane Thom, Libby City Council  
Kirby Maki, school superintendent  
Rita Windom, county commissioner  
John Norberg, city building inspector  
Dan Thede, City of Libby

MONTANIAN Feb 28, 01

# FLASHLIGHTS

A COMMENTARY ON THE NEWS BY DAVID F. LATHAM



## Flashlights on Montana



HELENA — Here were some of the legislative activities last week:

■ House Bill 539 would require state licensing for businesses that make high-interest loans to high-risk borrowers and use their cars as collateral. The bill passed the house 75-25 and moves to the Senate.

In other news:

Monday, February 12.

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — The preliminary results of last year's medical screening in Libby, Mont., show roughly one-third of people tested have lung abnormalities as a result of exposure to asbestos. This is compliments of the people who managed the W.R. Grace & Co.

vermiculite mine near Libby and successfully concealed the asbestos danger for so many years.

Now the state of Minnesota is getting involved because Grace also operated a vermiculite processing plant (translation: "asbestos-poisoning plant") in Minneapolis. The Minnesota Health Department is in the initial phases of a \$350,000 medical survey to assess the likely asbestos exposure of 6,000 past and present residents of the Minneapolis neighborhood near Grace's vermiculite processing plant, which shut down in 1989.

It is now well known that W.R. Grace knowingly concealed the dangers of asbestos. The company allowed its employees to wallow in the deadly white dust and take it home with them every night. The company allowed thousands of innocent people near the company's

mine and plants to be exposed for long periods. And Grace set aside hundreds of millions of dollars every year to pay off the victims and survivors of its deadly products.

All the facts show that W.R. Grace & Co. knew people would die. The question is, why are no criminal charges being filed? This company has been run like an corporate meth lab for decades, and the executives and managers who perpetrated the asbestos situation need to go to prison for it.

Please take a minute to call your elected representatives in Washington (phone numbers on page 2) and ask that criminal charges be filed.

MONTANIAN Feb 28, 01



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** Has EPA responded to Grace's offer (February 14-Western News) to perform the remaining cleanup and restoration work at the screening plant?

**A:** Yes. EPA has responded in a letter dated February 16, 2001 which is available at the EPA Information Center in Libby.

In short the letter states that:

- 1) EPA is willing to negotiate a legal order with Grace where EPA would complete the cleanup at the Parker property, including restoration, while Grace would transport the removed contaminated material to the mine for disposal and would perform cleanup at KDC's Bluffs and Flyway properties. The workplan for clean-up activities that EPA received from Grace last fall is not protective enough of public health.
- 2) EPA will not free Grace from liability for other chemicals that may be present in the removed materials. Grace has not provided any detailed information about other hazardous substances that it may have used during its thirty year ownership and operation of the former screening plant property. EPA will not spend Superfund money if it can be shown that Grace may be liable.
- 3) EPA will not dismiss penalty claims against Grace. However, because EPA does not want to direct Grace funds away from taking care of Grace caused public health problems in Libby, EPA proposes the following: EPA will direct a majority of the penalty amount to a non-profit organization, such as a medical trust, to provide health care to those in Libby suffering from asbestosis or mesothelioma.

Please visit the EPA Information Center at 501 Mineral Ave. in Libby to view a correspondence file including letters to and from Grace on these and other issues.

For more information call:

Wendy Thomi, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241

MONTANIAN

Feb 28, 01

# Libby Community Advisory Group Meeting Summary February 8, 2001

By Gerald Mueller

## Introductions

Gerald Mueller and Libby Community Advisory Group (CAG) members present introduced themselves. The CAG accepted as a new member, Joyce Baeth. Ms. Baeth is a member of the Libby City Council. A list of the members in attendance is attached below as Appendix 1.

## Agenda

Mr. Mueller reviewed an agenda for this meeting including the following topics:

- Presentation by Dr. Holian
- Draft Health Benefit Plan for Libby Asbestos Exposure
- Funding Request for Insulation Removal
- TOSC Subcommittee Report
- Agency Reports  
EPA  
ATSDR  
Lincoln County
- Public Comment

## Correction to the January 25, 2001

### Meeting Summary

DEQ's John Podolinsky asked that two changes be made to the January 25, 2001 meeting summary. First, under the DEQ report on page 5, Mr. Podolinsky's program name should have been listed as Asbestos Control Program. Second, on page 6, Mr. Podolinsky's response to the CAG member question should have read, "The indoor standard is 0.01 fibers per cubic centimeter."

## Presentation by Dr. Holian and Dr. Putman

### Dr. Holian

Dr. Black introduced Dr. Andrij Holian who in turn introduced his colleague Dr. Elizabeth Putman. Dr. Holian heads the Center for Environmental Health Sciences

in the School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences of the University of Montana. Dr. Putman is a UM faculty member who works in the Center. Dr. Holian stated that the Center pursues research in three areas, respiratory and auto-immune system disease, neurological disease, and genetic and molecular disease. Dr. Holian and his Center colleagues plan to conduct research on asbestos disease in Libby.

**CAG Member Question - We have heard before that not much is known about tremolite asbestos. Is that correct?**

**Answer -** We know that the chemistry of tremolite is different than other forms of asbestos. The literature reports that it is a more potent form of asbestos, but why is not known. Tremolite is rare, and Libby is the first instance of a concentrated exposure to tremolite asbestos that is being investigated. The Center intends to use a mouse model to simulate asbestos-related disease in humans. We intend to expose mice to different forms of asbestos to learn about their relative potency, how tremolite acts as a disease mediator, and how it stimulates auto-antibodies. We also hope to develop disease markers.

**CAG Member Question - What about tremolite and other forms of inflammatory diseases?**

**Answer -** The relationship between asbestos and inflammatory or auto-immune system diseases is not well understood. The lung is the only organ other than the skin that is exposed directly to air. Inside the lung is a large surface area at which gas exchange between the air and our blood occurs through passive diffusion. For this exchange to occur, the lung surface must be kept clean. Macrophage cells clean the lung surface. Asbestos kills one type of the macrophage cells, but not the type that activates our immune system. Thus asbestos may be involved in stimulating auto-immune system disease. By gathering data from Libby people, we intend to study, among other things, the relationship between asbestos and auto-immune disease. Specifically we will be asking for twelve volunteers from this community to provide

biological samples from their lungs as well as blood samples.

**Audience Member Question - How would the lung samples be taken?**

**Answer -** Sample donors would be given a general anesthesia. A tube would be introduced into the lung through which a sterile saline fluid would be introduced. The same amount of fluid would then be withdrawn through the tube. In this way biological samples can be obtained inside the lung where the disease occurs.

**CAG Member Question - Are you looking for specific people to take these samples from?**

**Answer -** We want people who are recently diagnosed and are early in the disease so that we can follow disease progression. Other characteristics such as age are not as important as disease progression.

**CAG Member Question - What factors such as sex, race, nationality, etc., matter in the development of asbestos-related diseases?**

**Answer -** We don't know. The literature doesn't say. Women appear to be subject more frequently than men to auto-immune system diseases.

**CAG Member Question - Libby has 60 to 70 reported cases of lupus. What should be the typical number of lupus cases for a community of our size?**

**Answer -** I don't know. We may be able to obtain national disease frequency.

### Dr. Putman

Dr. Putman explained that her area of expertise and interest is in human genetics. She stated that small changes in genes and the proteins they code for can cause significant changes at the organ and body level. By comparing the lung and blood samples, Dr. Putman hopes to develop biomarkers in blood that can be correlated with disease progression. She noted that people exposed to asbestos react differently. Some people do not develop disease. By understanding how the difference in reactions at the genetic level and how disease progresses, it

may be possible to arrest the disease.

**CAG Member Question - Will you be looking at synergistic effects such as smoking?**

**Answer -** We will be taking detailed medical and exposure histories in an attempt to account for such synergies. Smoking causes different cancers than asbestos exposure. Cancer is a very complex process involving both initiators and promoters. Smoke particles may be adsorbed onto asbestos particles, so that the simultaneous combination of smoking and asbestos exposure may promote the incidence of smoking-related cancer. Such a synergy is now only an unproven idea.

**CAG Member Question - Could asbestos exposure also promote other cancer inducers such as effluent from an asphalt plant?**

**Answer by Dr. Holian -** Tobacco smoke is the worst pollution one is likely to experience. Asphalt plant emissions would cause a much lower, but potentially continuous exposure. To act as a promoter, asbestos

exposure probably would have to be simultaneous with other cancer sources. One has to weigh the economic benefits of an asphalt plant with the risk of any pollution it may produce.

**CAG Member Question - People were exposed to asbestos in Libby as infants, children, and adults. Will you be able to breakdown your research among these categories?**

**Answer -** We hope to. The exposure histories are very important.

**Audience Member Question - How much fluid will be injecting into the lung during your sampling?**

**Answer -** When taking the biological samples from lungs, we will be injecting a total of 300 milliliters (about a half of a cup) of sterile saline in six increments of 50 ml. In other words six different injections and withdrawals of 50 ml will occur in each sampling session.

(See CAG on page 8)



## Please don't squander this opportunity

An open letter to Libby City Council:

Please allow me a few minutes of your time, which I believe will prove to be well worth your while.

Unless you are receiving 50 percent return-on-investment interest on the federal funds allocated for community recovery from asbestos mining problems, you owe an explanation to constituents as to why not.

In my search for funding sources so Chart+Plus Co. can create jobs needed to help stabilize the local economy, I have consistently been forced to look out of state. Areas whose economy has gone from bust to amazing refer me to one type of funding — commercial finance companies. Those who are interested in funding projects even in Montana manage their funds to revitalize sluggish economies to earn as much as 50 percent annual interest rate by using short-term

loans and financing programs.

As you review proposals to spend the federal allocation, you should consider only those that stabilize the local economy while returning 50 percent annual interest, or be ready to explain why to the stricken community that qualified you for this allocation. Libby has the potential to raise the \$150 million trust fund needed for medical expenses for asbestos victims.

Chart+Plus Co. has been advised by LADC Inc. to send our interest payments to out-of-state economies. Commissioners believe our proposed location will better serve college needs rather than industry to employ your constituents while importing money into the region to be circulated within the local economy instead of depending solely on recirculated money locally, indicating that this economic recovery opportunity will be used as was the Stimson funds, which

disappeared in a bureaucratic management puzzle that left them scraping for pennies to cover operating expenses until this rescue arrived.

Chart+Plus Co. has proposed paying 50 percent annual interest rate to use the funds allocated for economic recovery in Libby to create 114 living-wage jobs with up to a total of 530 in this and support service companies in Lincoln County, plus possible part-time seasonal positions in peak sales periods to achieve sales projections. This \$4,058,400 annually would help fund community grant projects without depleting the allocated amount, year after year, if desired.

Libby City Council has been given the opportunity to empower local economic recovery or follow that path that turns dollars into grains of sand in hope they will somehow fill the rat holes that do not produce the stability needed.

Let us provide the jobs citizens need to afford the college courses offered and use funds from the interest retained in the local economy to budget community projects including the college and other community services that are affordable when the people earn a decent living wage.

Thank you for considering Chart+Plus Co. funding before the clock runs down.

**Stanley G. Davis**  
3264 Iron Creek Road  
Troy, MT 59935

cc: Libby City Council, P.O. Box 1428, Libby, MT 59923  
Sen. Bill Crismore, LADC, Inc., 237 Airfield Road, Libby, MT 59923

Ralph Heinert, Mitch Richael, Shirley Chase, Jim Morey, Ardell Filler, Linda Gerard, LADC Inc., P.O. Box 621, Libby, MT

Some of Chart+Plus Company's suppliers total \$300 million annual asset injection value by Sony and others.

MONTANIAN

Feb. 21, 01

## ATSDR to release results of Libby medical screening

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced Feb. 16 that an interim report of the results of the Libby, Mont., medical testing program will be released on Thursday, Feb. 22, 2001, following the February meeting of the Citizen's Advisory Group in Libby.

The meeting will be Thursday, Feb. 22, 7-9 p.m. at Libby City Council chambers, 952 E. Spruce St.

ATSDR representatives will be on hand at the meeting to discuss the report and to answer questions.

ATSDR prepared the interim

report to provide residents with a summary of the medical testing results received by ATSDR to date. This report includes the data for a small number of participants in the testing program, with results from 1,078 of the more than 6,000 participants completed.

Copies of the interim report will also be available for public review beginning Feb. 23, 2001, at the following places:

■ Lincoln County Library, 220 W. 6th St., Libby, Montana 59923, Contact: Gail Anderson at (406) 293-2778.

■ ATSDR Office, 501 Mineral Avenue, Libby, Montana 59923, Contact: Dan Strausbaugh at (406) 293-2728

■ Lincoln County Health Department, 418 Mineral Ave., Libby, MT 59923, Contact: Ron Anderson at (406) 293-7781 ext. 228.

Libby, Mont., or Elko, Nev., community members seeking information on the interim report, or who would like to receive a copy, should call the ATSDR Information Center toll free, at 1-888-ATSDR (1-888-422-8737). Callers should refer to the "Libby, Montana, site."

ATSDR Regional Representative Dan Strausbaugh also may be called for information at (406) 441-1120 ext. 257 in Helena, Mont.





# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I didn't participate in the medical screening, but I've changed my mind. Will there be another opportunity?

**A:** Guidance for future testing is being developed. The timing of additional testing and priorities for who may be tested have not yet been determined. However, you can still call 1-800-439-8308 to determine your eligibility for future testing. When dates and priorities are set, everyone eligible will be notified.

For more information call:

Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR at 406-441-1150 ext. 257 or 406-293-2728, or  
Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241

MONTANA Feb 21, 01

MONTANIAN. Feb 14 01

# PUBLIC NOTICE

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry [ATSDR-165]  
Availability of Chemical Specific Consultation for Tremolite-related Asbestos

AGENCY: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA), as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA), Section 104 (i) (4) [42 U.S.C. 9604 (i) (4)], directs the Administrator of ATSDR to provide consultations upon request on health issues relating to exposure to hazardous or toxic substances to the Administrator of EPA, State officials, and local officials. A health consultation provides advice on a specific public health issue related to real or possible human exposure to toxic material and is a method ATSDR uses to respond rapidly to requests for assistance.

This notice announces that a chemical-specific public health consultation, Tremolite-related Asbestos, is now available for public comment. This ATSDR consultation reviews the scientific literature describing the relationship between exposure to tremolite-related asbestos and resultant health effects.

DATES: In order to be considered, comments on this draft consultation must be received within 45 days from the date of this publication. Comments received after the close of the public comment period will be considered at the discretion of ATSDR based upon what is deemed to be in the best interest of the general public.

ADDRESSES: Requests for copies of the draft consultation should be sent to the ATSDR Information Center, Division of Toxicology, Agency of Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Mailstop E-57, 1600 Clifton Road, NE., Atlanta, Georgia 30333. Written comments regarding the draft consultation should be sent to the same address. ATSDR reserves the right to provide only one copy of the draft consultation free of charge.

Written comments submitted in response to this notice should bear the docket control number ATSDR-165. Because all public comments regarding ATSDR health consultations are available for inspection after the final consultation is published, no confidential business information should be submitted in response to this notice.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan L. Kess, MD, MPH, Division of Toxicology, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Mailstop E-29, 1600 Clifton Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30333, telephone (404) 639-6300. Copies of the Health Consult are available at EPA/ATSDR Information Center 501 Mineral Ave., Libby (293-2728).

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

ATSDR prepared this document, Tremolite-related Asbestos, in response to the identification of tremolite-related asbestos fibers in vermiculite ore mined near Libby, Montana. The contaminated vermiculite has been mined, distributed, and processed into many products utilized across the country. Workers, household contacts, and the general public who come in contact with contaminated products may be at risk of exposure and potential health effects.

Georgi Jones  
Director, Office of Policy and External Affairs  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

### Asbestos support group meets Feb. 15

The evening support group for individuals impacted by asbestos-related disease will meet on Thursday, Feb. 15, at 7 p.m. at 415 Louisiana Ave. The day (see **UPDATE** on page 10)

(from page 1)

group will meet next on Monday, Feb. 19 at 2 p.m. at the same location. The groups will meet regularly on the first and third Thursday and Monday of each month. Their purpose is to help people identify the impacts of asbestos-related stress on their lives, to get accurate information about these impacts, and to work together for positive solutions. There is no charge to participants. For more information, call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

MONTANIAN Feb. 14, 01



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q • EPA says it will use a risk assessment to estimate whether my home is safe in the long run. What is a risk assessment?**

**A:** Risk assessment is the process of estimating the likelihood that something bad will happen. EPA develops risk assessments on a site-by-site basis. In the case of asbestos in Libby, the goal is to understand whether cleanup is necessary. If so, what level of cleanup will make sure that you and your family are protected over a lifetime.

A risk assessment includes four important steps:

- 1) **Data collection/ Hazard Identification** – Environmental samples (soil, air, water, sediments), and biological information (chest x-rays, pulmonary function tests) are collected. The samples are analyzed in laboratories or clinics to reveal the types and levels of hazardous substances present, their potential to cause harm, and exposures which may have occurred. Community members help EPA with this step by voluntarily allowing the agency to take samples and sharing information on current and future uses of the area and where hazardous substances are most likely to be found.
- 2) **Exposure assessment** – After risk assessors have the data, they look for pathways of exposure from a source to people or animals who may breathe, touch or consume the hazardous substance. The risk assessor estimates how much of the contamination a person is likely to breathe based on information collected in step one and whether it is a child, an elderly person or a worker. The risk assessor also considers how long and how often people are exposed.
- 3) **Toxicity assessment** – During this step, risk assessors develop a mathematical relationship between the exposure (or dose) and the toxic effect (response) of the chemical of concern. They look at various cancer and non-cancer health effects from different levels of exposure. Assessors usually rely on previous scientific studies if enough data exists.
- 4) **Risk characterization** – Finally, risk assessors combine the results of the first three steps to come up with an estimate of the risks posed by the site. Risk assessments are usually uncertain and the risk assessor documents these uncertainties. The results are then used by the site manager, who decides whether cleanup actions must be taken to protect you and your family.

EPA's risk assessment for Libby vermiculite insulation may not be done until the end of the calendar year.

For more information, call: Chris Weis at 303-312-6671 or  
Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241.

FEB 14, 01

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Feb 14, 01

MONTANIAN

# Asbestos on school tracks worries superintendent

- To: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Paul Peronard, On-Site Coordinator
- From: K.W. [Kirby] Maki, Superintendent
- Subject: High School and Middle School tracks
- Date: February 6, 2001

Libby School District #4 is extremely concerned about the W.R. Grace mill tailings on both the high school and middle school tracks. The tailings contain a concentrated level of tremolite asbestos. Since the tracks are in need of repair or replacement, the mill tailings pose a huge health and financial problem in the near future. A brief history of the high school track follows:

The track facility was constructed at the high school in the early 1970's and originally used some red crushed gravel for fill. However, it did not work out, so we

searched for other suitable material. Cinders were next to impossible to procure and an all-weather track surface was not financially feasible. A worker at W.R. Grace told us of the vermiculite substance and how effectively it was being used at W.R. Grace as their dam. The dam held their tailings and it packed quite well, as well as being able to withstand weight as evidenced by the vehicles driving on it. A school official was invited to visit and check out the site. It was determined that the material could probably work as a surface on the track.

Shortly after that visit to the site, W.R. Grace started transporting the vermiculite in their trucks from the mine site to the high school track. The vermiculite remained as the track surface for approximately eight years. During this time nightly practices were held on the track as well as track meets hosted by LHS.

In 1982, the Superintendent of Schools received a call from the W.R. Grace Business Manager informing him that the vermiculite on the tracks posed potential problems as it had tremolite asbestos fibers in it, which could be medically harmful. He made it clear that we couldn't keep the vermiculite track in its present state. He gave two options:

Number one, W.R. Grace would come and remove the vermiculite fill, or number two, they would pay to have the vermiculite encapsulated. After consulting with school officials and coaches the second option, encapsulating the vermiculite, was recommended.

In 1983, with the assistance of the Lincoln County Road Department, blacktop was hauled in and laid on top of the vermiculite base. That spring the track team had to run in flat shoes (no spikes) due to the asphalt base. Then during that summer (1983) Action Courts of

Minnesota laid an all-weather rubberized surface on the track. During the spring of 1984, the first practices and meets were held on the new track.

Due to the condition of the tracks and the potential liability (health and financial), Libby School District #4 is requesting the implementation of an action plan for both the high school and middle school tracks.

- 1 Tests Conducted
- 2 WR Grace Tailings Removed
- 3 Base Fill Material Replaced
- 4 Asphalt Track Replaced at the Middle School
- 5 All-Weather Track Reinstalled at the high school

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

**K.W. [Kirby] Maki,**  
Superintendent of Schools  
[Libby, Montana]



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I've heard that EPA is cleaning up homes in Minnesota. Why are Libby homes not getting cleaned up.

**A:** EPA is doing some clean-up work in yards of Minnesota homes that have been contaminated with a rock waste product called "stoner rock" from a vermiculite expansion operation in Minneapolis. This rock contains up to 70% asbestos. It looks like indistinct grey rocks that can be up to several inches in diameter. Some of this material has been found in the western part of the Export Plant, but has not been seen in other areas around Libby.

"Stoner rock" is different from the vermiculite concentrate that went to the Screening Plant and to the Export Plant to be either bagged or expanded. The vermiculite concentrate is dark grey to black, and has the form of small "flakes." EPA has found concentrations of 1% to 12% asbestos in this vermiculite.

Please call the EPA Information Center in Libby at 293-6194 to report any unpopped vermiculite on your property or in or around Libby. EPA may eventually remove the material but, in the meantime, we advise that you don't disturb it.

No work is being done to remove vermiculite insulation or other potential asbestos sources from homes in Minnesota or Montana. To report vermiculite insulation in your home, please call the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department at 293-7781, X228.

For more information, call:

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150, X241 or  
Ron Anderson, Director Lincoln County Environmental Health at 293-7781, X228

## Community Update

*News and information of  
the communities served by*

**The Montanian**

Send announcements to:  
"Update," The Montanian,  
P.O. Box 946, Libby, MT 59923

### Community Advisory Group meets Feb. 8

The Community Advisory Group will hold its regular twice-monthly meeting on Thursday, Feb. 8, in the City Council chamber at Libby City Hall, 952 E. Spruce St. The group meets regularly to discuss the status of the various aspects of the asbestos issue in Libby. All meetings are open to the public and everyone is invited to attend. For information, call the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Information Center at 291-6194.

Feb 7, 01

MONTANIAN

# County exploring community health center

## *Federally-funded center would not treat asbestos-related diseases*

County officials are pursuing plans seeking federal money to build a community health center in Libby after a public meeting Jan. 31.

The center would provide low-cost, primary-care medical services but would not be set up to meet the advanced medical needs of asbestos victims. The center would be intended to provide reduced-cost care for people with low incomes but would be open to everyone on a sliding-fee scale.

Funding to build and operate the facility would come from an annual federal grant. The deadline for applying each year is May 1. The facility would also expect to generate income through fees for medical services.

Lincoln County commissioner Rita Windom said the county will proceed with applying for the grant after she received a nearly unanimous show of support from the 58 people attending the meeting.

"It's going to take a lot of hard work, and especially if we're going to meet that May 1 deadline," Windom said.

A second meeting was planned for Feb. 1 in Eureka.

"After that, we'll probably be having some more meetings," Windom said.

Dr. Alan Strange and Mary Beth Frideres of the Montana Primary Care Association are providing expertise and guidance on the

clinic proposal. Frideres first came to Libby last September and compiled statistics on poverty and health care that can be used for grant applications for a community health center or other needs.

Start-up grants for community health centers are currently set at \$650,000, Strange said. After a center is established, grants can be renewed annually at higher funding levels. He said that some health centers in the United States have been continuously funded since the 1960s, and some have been in operation in Montana since the early 1980s.

In response to a question from a woman in the audience, Strange said that, while the center would serve the primary medical needs of low-income people, it would not be set up to serve the advanced medical needs of Libby's burgeoning population of asbestos-sickened people.

"No," Strange said.

Frideres said that Dr. Strange has been involved in establishing all of Montana's six community health centers.

Centers in Billings, Missoula, Helena and Great Falls are affiliated with local health departments while the centers in Butte and Livingston are privately operated. Regulations require community health centers to be governed by a local board of directors, Strange said.

Federally-funded community health centers must provide primary medical care, laboratory, x-ray and pharmacy services, preventive dental care and health education. A chief executive officer, chief financial officer and chief medical officer must be employed by the center while other services could be contracted out to local healthcare providers. Patients who need specialized care would be referred to

another provider such as the hospital.

Strange said patients would pay fees according to their income. Persons below 100 percent of the national poverty level would be asked for donations, while those between 100 and 200 percent would pay on a sliding scale established by the center's board. Patients above 200 percent of the national poverty level would pay the full fee based

on fees charged at other local health care facilities.

Strange said his group will help prepare a grant application for a community health center in Libby. An application can be prepared in as little as two weeks, he said. Local matching funds may help in procuring a grant but are not required, Strange said.



MONTANIAN Feb 7, 01

# Bankruptcy an option, says Grace

Chapter 11 bankruptcy was mentioned Jan. 29 as an option for W.R. Grace & Co., which faces over 100,000 lawsuits because of the company's asbestos-laden products.

Grace CEO Paul Norris made the announcement in the company's final quarterly report for the year 2000.

"Asbestos litigation continues to be our company's biggest challenge," he said. "During 2000 we have seen the litigation environment worsen and become more uncertain."

Almost 50,000 bodily injury claims were received during 2000, an 81-percent increase over 1999, the company's financial report said.

As of Dec. 31, 2000, Grace has pending seven property damage suits, nine attic insulation class action lawsuits and 124,907 bodily injury claims.

Eighty-four claims by Libby area residents are pending in 19th District Court against the company, which owns a former vermiculite mine near Libby. The vermiculite was contaminated with deadly tremolite asbestos.

"Recent adverse events in asbestos bodily litigation, including petitions for bankruptcy reorganization by several co-defendant companies have caused an environment that increases the risk of more claims being filed than previously projected, with higher settlement demands," Grace's financial report

said.

In October, Owens Corning voluntarily filed a reorganization petition under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. Since then, other companies facing asbestos lawsuits have filed for bankruptcy.

Grace has deftly managed asbestos-related lawsuits for over 20 years, despite the bankruptcy of a number of other co-defendants. Last year, a Grace official reported the company had paid out \$15.6 million in awards from 64 cases related to its Libby operations.

A former Grace executive, Lyn Latchford of Morris Township, N.J., told The Montanian last September that the company routinely set aside money to pay off the survivors of workers killed by exposure to asbestos.

In its latest financial report, Grace reported its asbestos-related liability at \$1.1 billion.

In Libby, Grace promised to \$250,000 a year to St. John's Lutheran Hospital to help provide medical services for victims of the company's asbestos-tainted products.

Grace is currently providing free, limited medical insurance coverage for area residents diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. More than 90 people had been accepted into the program of mid-January.

Grace's local spokesman, Al Stringer, has said at public meetings that there will be no health plan if the company ceases to

# Western News JAN 01, 01 Involvement, support needed for chamber, community

BY ROGER MORRIS

Western News Publisher

Community involvement and support are needed to help Libby get through it's present asbestos crisis and economic woes, outgoing chamber of commerce president Paul Neils said Saturday during the annual membership banquet.

The asbestos issue was the community's top issue during the year 2000 and the Libby Area Chamber of Commerce played a total role in dealing with outside media to get across the message that Libby was not a "toxic dump site," Neils said.

"The chamber handled hundreds if not thousands of calls from outside media about the health and safety of the community," Neils said. "I'm here to tell you that there isn't another organization that can influence the outside media about the condition of the community like the chamber."

The second major hurdle facing the chamber during the past year, and continuing into 2001, is a decline in membership, he said. Neils said the decline was caused by economic reasons.

Businesses waiting to see what the chamber's board of directors are going to do in hiring a new executive director are contributing to more problems, Neils said.

"It's created a Catch-22," he continued. "We're entering into interviews for a prospective director and we don't have the first month's salary."

Neils cited three aspects of community health: people staying within a community; people working within a community and people financially supporting a community.



Chamber board member Stefani Hicswa presents Jerry Bennett with the Citizen of the Year award.

"Without people living and working to make it better, you have no community," he said.

"In our community, there is a core group who make a difference to this community," he said. "I believe Libby has more than it's fair share."

Neils passed on the chamber president's gavel to Tim Steele, president for the year 2001.

Steele encouraged people to get involved and get others involved in both the chamber and community.

"We need to pull together for economic growth," Steele said. "The chamber can play an influential role in this. We need your help to both staff the chamber and make it better."

Steele said he has heard from many business people who aren't chamber members that the Libby chamber doesn't do anything for them.

"Indirectly we do," he said. "I believe in the trickle down theory."

The chamber's promotional effort to bring people to Libby benefits some businesses directly, such as the motels and restaurants, Steele said. People working at those businesses spend money in the community benefiting more businesses, he said.

"I would like to just emphasize that we all need to get involved," he said. "I don't see my chamber presidency as a privilege, it's a responsibility."

Volunteer of the Year Awards were given to Karen Ross and Cynthia Stephens. Ross was recognized for countless hours volunteering in the chamber office as a receptionist, filing, organizing the Parade of Lights, working on Christmas Comes to Life, working with the Friends of the Libby Library and Libby Nordicfest.

Stephens was honored for volunteering to re-design the chamber's website and keeping it updated. She also voluntarily maintains the City of Libby website.

Rich Burns of Western Building Center was recognized as the Business Person of the Year for the donations and involvement of the building center in numerous community events during the past year.

Citizen of the year recognition was given to past chamber president Jerry Bennett for his continuing work at several different levels to make Libby a better place to live and do business.

"It is my pleasure to serve the chamber board," Bennett said. "A lot of people look at it as work but this community means

so much to me because I've grown up here."

The new chamber board of directors was installed. Directors are Cathy Jenkins, Stefani Hicswa, Rich Burns, Chari Lucas, Gary Livesey, Carol Cady, Paul Neils, Joe Fedorchak, Gary Njirich and Magdalena Radlmayr.

MONTANIAN

JAN 31, 01



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I understand that the Community Advisory Group, in conjunction with St. John's Lutheran Hospital, has prepared a health benefit program for the community to consider. Where can I get a copy of this draft document and how can I have input into the final format of the plan?

**A:** You can get a copy of the draft plan at the EPA Information Center at 501 Mineral Ave. in Libby or call and have one sent to you. The number is 406-293-6194.

The Health Benefit Program is conceptual at this point since it is not yet funded. When funded, it will be a health insurance plan designed to meet the needs of people who have asbestos-related medical needs. Make sure your needs are known!

The Community Advisory Group will discuss the plan at the next meeting on Feb. 8 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Libby City Council chambers.

For more information or to provide input on the plan call:

Kerry Beasley at 406-293-3325 or

Sandy Wagner at 406-293-5010

MONTANIAN JAN 31, 01

### **Asbestos support group meets Feb. 1**

The support group for individuals impacted by asbestos-related disease will meet on Thursday, Feb. 1, at 7 p.m. at 415 Louisiana Ave. The mission of the group is to help people to identify the impacts of asbestos-related stress on their lives and to work together for positive solutions. There is no charge to participants. For more information, on this and other upcoming groups, please call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.

## Asbestos hazard has been documented

*(The following letter was supplied to The Montanian by Clinton Maynard of the Libby Area Asbestos Research Group)*

August 1, 2000

Dr. Linda Rosenstock, Director  
National Institute for Occupational  
Safety & Health  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
Room 715H  
200 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Rosenstock:

I would like to bring to your attention a significant occupational and public health concern regarding the widespread dissemination of amphibole (actinolite-tremolite series) asbestos in Libby, Mont., and potentially in vermiculite end-products used throughout the country. As you may be aware, NIOSH researchers evaluated vermiculite miners, that were exposed to asbestos, in Libby, Mont., in the early 1980s. NIOSH investigators found significantly elevated risks of asbestos-related malignant and non-malignant respiratory disease

among these workers. Concurrently, Dr. Jim Lockey at the University of Cincinnati identified elevated pulmonary disease among workers with much lower asbestos exposures at a facility processing Libby vermiculite in Ohio. These articles have been included for your information.

In November 1999, Libby became the focus of national attention when it was reported that a number of residents that did not work at the vermiculite or processing facilities were suffering from asbestos-related diseases. Subsequently, researchers from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Public Health Service (PHS) Region 8, and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) began intensive environmental and public health investigations of the site. Medical screening (e.g., chest x-rays, pulmonary function testing, questionnaires) is currently being conducted on 4200 [sic] former workers, family contacts, and others potentially at risk. NIOSH researchers (Dr. Robert Castellan, Dr. Les-

lie Stayner, Dr. Pat Sullivan, Dr. Vince Castranova, Mr. Ken Wallingford, and Mr. Ralph Zumwalde) have also been providing intermittent technical assistance to these efforts.

One issue that has very recently come to our attention, is that end-product vermiculite insulation, and most likely other end-products, apparently contained appreciable quantities of asbestos, but were marketed, sold, and used throughout the country without adequate labeling or warnings and were commonly considered to be non-toxic. ... Internal [W.R. Grace & Co.] documentation and recent testing of residential insulation materials, reportedly used in over one million homes, reveals that even minimal handling by workers or residents poses a substantial health risk (airborne exposures up to 150 times the current occupational standards [0.1 f/cc]).

Recent discussions between the aforementioned federal partners working at the Libby site identified the pressing need for increased NIOSH participation and response to occupational health issues of concern. Suggestions for NIOSH consideration include:

1) the need for further charac-

terization of current worker exposures (e.g., construction/insulation workers, nursery workers) that occur when handling vermiculite end-products;

2) nationwide (i.e., "Hazard Alert") warning to workers of the potential dangers associated with these products;

3) possible epidemiologic or clinical investigations of appropriate groups that may currently or formally be at increased risk; and

4) a collaborative update of the original NIOSH Libby cohorts by NIOSH and ATSDR investigators to help understand the clinical progression of disease, morbidity, and mortality associated with this unique, and perhaps more toxic, form of asbestos. This information would be of great value, not only to those in Libby, but also for those at risk throughout the country.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in this matter please contact me at (303) 844-7860 or Dr. Aubrey Miller at (303) 844-7857.

Sincerely,

Hugh S. Sloan, D.S.W.  
Assistant Surgeon General  
Regional Health Administrator

**JANUARY 17, 2001**

## **Community Update**

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P.O. Box 946, Libby, MT 59923

### **Asbestos support group meets Jan. 18**

The support group for individuals impacted by asbestos-related disease will meet on Thursday, Jan. 18, at 7 p.m. at 415 Louisiana Ave. The mission of the group is to help people to identify the impacts of asbestos-related stress on their lives and to work together for positive solutions. There is no charge to participants. For more information, on this and other upcoming groups, please call Laura Sedler at 293-0180.



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q.** I participated in the medical testing program. If I did not get a telephone call shortly following my medical testing informing me of any abnormalities, does that mean that my tests were completely normal?

**A.** No, not necessarily. It is possible that you will be informed of an abnormality on your chest x-ray or lung function tests in the letter ATSDR will send you. Some test participants were notified of an abnormality by telephone immediately following their examination. These calls were made when the abnormality was found to require an immediate evaluation by a physician. Abnormalities which did not require immediate medical attention, or were identified by physicians in later reviews will be reported to participants by mail. The letters notifying participants of their test results are being sent as the reviews of the x-rays are completed by all reviewing physicians.

MONTANIAN

JAN 17, 2001



## January 17 meeting

On January, 17, 2001 the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners will hold an informational public meeting at 7 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room at the Libby City Hall Complex. The purpose of the meeting will be for the commissioners to discuss and to collect public comment on possible county governmental responses to the public health, business and environmental impacts of asbestos and other hazardous substances in the county. Topics to be discussed include:

- The impacts of asbestos on the county;
- The option for the county government to undertake no response;
- The possible enactment of a county health ordinance addressing the abatement of hazardous substances in the county through the county board of health or other appropriate county governmental body;
- The potential creation and funding of a public trust to provide appropriate and secure health care for county residence impacted by asbestos through enforcement of such an ordinance; and
- The possible options for funding of any county response to these issues.

*Susan Drumheller*

MONTANIAN

JAN 17, 2001



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I've heard that Libby may get an EPA grant for economic development. Does EPA do economic development?

**A:** In mid-January, the City of Libby will submit an application for a Brownfields Assessment Pilot Grant. This competitive grant process awards \$200,000 grants to states, cities and other political subdivisions, such as universities, to assess "Brownfields" sites for economic development potential. The link to EPA is that a significant portion of the money is used for environmental assessment. The money cannot be used for cleanup nor for construction.

A Brownfield site is defined as a site, or portion of a site, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. Often these sites are not developed or reused because potential developers fear of environmental contamination.

The application proposes that the grant be managed by the Lincoln County Economic Development Council. Proposed activities include environmentally assessing sites in the Libby/Troy area for contamination and choosing several sites for redevelopment. The proposal also includes a suggestion by the Community Advisory Group to do an economic impact assessment to determine what the economic impact of the asbestos crisis has been on the economy of Libby.

For more information call:

*MONTANIAN*

*JAN 10, 2001*

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator at 406-441-1150 x241



# OPINIONS

The letters to the editor section is an open public forum. We will publish all letters of interest to the general public, free of charge, as space and timeliness allows. All letters must include a name, address and phone number where the writer can be reached day or night. We will publish writer's name and address, but not the phone number unless specifically requested to do so. Unsigned letters are never published. All unsolicited letters become the property of The Montanian and are subject to editing for spelling, grammar, clarity and length. Limit 300 words. Opinions are those of the writer, not The Montanian. Send letters to:

EDITOR, THE MONTANIAN, P.O. BOX 946, LIBBY, MT 59923. email [montanian@libby.org](mailto:montanian@libby.org)

## State and federal governments let Libby down

*Editor's note: This letter was presented to Rebecca Hammer, EPA Region 8 along with other information, June 15, 2000.*

**By Clinton Maynard**

By 1935, it was known that asbestos caused lung disease. By 1956, the state of Montana knew that the time in Libby had a serious asbestos problem. The state of Montana's occupational health agency asked that efforts be made to reduce the hazard to the workers. These requests continued for many years that followed. Steps were taken to reduce to asbestos levels in the workplace, obviously those steps were highly inadequate.

It is hard to believe that a state health official could go to that mine and mill site and not see the plume of dust coming out of the dry mill. It is also hard to believe that it never occurred to these health officials that maybe this asbestos dust might be going to the entire population in the area. Hundreds of tons of asbestos dust were spewing from that mountain each year and the state evidently had no concern for the surrounding populations.

At some point the federal government came to the realization that asbestos is deadly toxic. OSHA began lowering the permissible exposure level (PEL) in the occupational setting (exposure levels allowed over an 8-hour work day).

In occupational settings, optical microscopes are used to do fiber counts, with the size limit being longer than 5 microns in length, and measured per cubic centimeter of air (fibers/cc). For comparison, the typical sugar cube would meas-

ure just over 3 cubic centimeters (3 cc.) In 1971, OSHA set an occupational permissible exposure level of 12.0 fibers/cc. In 1972, this level was reduced to 5.0 fibers/cc. By 1976, the permissible exposure level was reduced to 2 fibers/cc. In 1986, this occupational permissible exposure level was reduced to 0.2 fibers/cc. Today's permissible exposure level in an occupational setting is set by OSHA at 0.1 fibers/cc.

In December 1975, during a rainy period, W.R. Grace sampled the air in downtown Libby, resulting in fiber counts ranging as high as 1.5 fibers/cc. This means that the people who lived in Libby at that time were exposed to 15 times the level of asbestos air pollution currently allowed by OSHA in the occupational setting. A resident, exposed to this level of air pollution, would have inhaled over 20 million toxic asbestos fibers in a 24-hour period.

In 1980, Midwest Research Institute, commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), came up with an optical count of .5 fibers/cc outside Libby during a time in October when it had been raining. This October 1980 count was after the new wet mill was in operation, which came on line in the mid 1970s.

While data is limited, it is safe to say that these were not isolated instances and that during dry weather times and periods of inversions over Libby, asbestos fiber counts could have been much higher. W.R. Grace ceased operations in 1990. This would suggest that EPA as well as the state of

Montana, not to mention W. R. Grace, had no concern for the safety of the populations of Lincoln County Montana. Maybe the people of Lincoln County should let government off the hook and just say "you guys shouldn't have been sleeping on the job."

W. R. Grace did what industry does — make a profit and get away with as much as you can. This is why we have government agencies such as the EPA, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, to oversee industry and to make sure what happened here doesn't happen. These government agencies are entrusted by the people so that we don't have to walk around with microscopes, testing the air we breathe.

Our governments have grossly failed us, and what do we get? We get to live with diseases and death, and we get to listen to government say, "don't come to us for your long-term health needs."

Does W. R. Grace really care about our health or health care? Their contribution in the form of asbestos has made the answer pretty clear.

We are a population that have been exposed, without choice, to a toxic substance that will bring us cancer, disability, suffocation and death. If government has any dignity or compassion, the people of Lincoln County, Montana, United States of America, will be compensated with the finest, full medical coverage, that is honored, where we may choose to seek treatment. We will also be compensated with

the diligent research effort that is needed to find the answers to curing the diseases that we are faced with.

We will be provided with reclamation efforts that will provide a clean environment for our future. The people will be provided educational programs that will teach us about the toxicity of tremolite asbestos and what past exposure means to our health. Education that might afford us the opportunity to make informed decisions in regard to our health care. We will be provided with air quality monitoring on a weekly basis, which will inform us of asbestos fiber counts for all size fibers. The people of Libby and Lincoln County have the right to know. This environmental disaster has impacted our health, our economy and many of us will have been robbed of our golden years. We were given no choice.

Finally, the people of Lincoln County are encouraged by the new faces of the EPA and ATSDR, Paul Peronard and crew, who have presented themselves with sincerity and heartfelt concern. We feel that if provided with the means, these folks will do what is right for the people and our environment. Our federal government spends billions of tax dollars on smart bombs, in the name of keeping Americans out of harm's way, we too are Americans.

*(Clinton Maynard advocates free, 100 percent medical care for all residents who were exposed to asbestos from the W.R. Grace & Co. mine near Libby)*

MONTANIAN

JAN 3, 2001

## Libby screening reveals heart and lung problems

Health screenings of thousands of people have found likely heart and lung problems among former Libby mine workers and area residents, but federal health officials won't have a complete answer about the size and scope of the problem until sometime in February.

From July through October, thousands of current and former residents of Libby and Troy, and 90 people in Elko, Nev., who used to live in Libby were tested for potential asbestos-related illnesses.

Officials of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) are trying to determine the extent of illnesses linked to the former W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine in Libby that released asbestos into the air.

At least 88 asbestos-related illnesses and deaths in the Libby area have been connected to the Grace mine that shut down 10 years ago.

Along with a massive cleanup effort mounted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the ATSDR is compiling

a study of the potential health effects of the mining operations. Of the people tested by Oct. 16, Libby radiologists reported abnormalities in the chest x-rays of 313 people. Those people were immediately referred to doctors for follow-up tests.

The EPA said most of the referrals were made for heart-related conditions, but 35 people tested showed thickening of the chest walls, a sign of asbestos exposure.

Of the approximately 6,000 people tested by mid-October, 300 people had worked at the Grace mine and 368 had other work-related contact with vermiculite dust, ATSDR said.

From the chest x-rays of 429 people, 40 were sent for further evaluation. And for the 4,646 people who had lung-function tests, 12 were told to go to a doctor immediately.

A full report on the test results by ATSDR will be made in February.



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

## **Q • Is ATSDR's mortality study related to the • medical screening?**

✓ **A:** No. The Medical Screening and the Mortality Study are two different things.

The Medical Screening was designed to check Libby residents for evidence of lung disease. Over 6,000 people were screened and ATSDR has begun to send out the results to those people who participated in the program.

The Mortality Study is a review of death certificates from 1979 to 1998 to determine underlying causes of death for residents of the Libby area. The review was conducted to compare death rates for residents of the Libby area with those in Montana and in the United States for selected diseases associated with exposure to asbestos.

The Mortality Study showed that deaths from asbestosis were approximately 40-60 times higher than expected. Deaths from mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer, also appeared to be higher than expected. The number of deaths over that time period from other causes, including lung cancer and digestive cancer, was lower than expected.

For more information call:

*MONTANIAN  
JAN 3, 2001*

Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR Montana Representative at 293-2728 or  
Steve Dearwent, Mortality Study Author at 1-404-639-0669

**Wednesday, January 3, 2001**

## **Briefs**

### **Asbestos support group meets Jan. 4**

The support group for individuals impacted by asbestos related disease will meet on Thursday, Jan. 4, at 7 p.m. at 415 Louisiana Ave.

The mission of the group is to help people identify the impacts of the asbestos related stress on their lives and to work together for positive solutions. There is no charge to participants.

For more information, on this and other upcoming groups, call Laura at 293-0180.



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: I recently participated in the asbestos medical testing in Libby. What is the status of the reports from those tests?**

**A:** The results of your x-ray reviews, lung function test, and health interview are combined into one report. When you receive the report, you may wish to review your results with your personal physician. If your tests show any abnormalities, your physician may suggest that you undergo additional testing to further evaluate your health before making recommendations for your personal health care.

- ✓ As of December 15th, 750 test results report letters had been mailed to ATSDR medical testing program participants. ATSDR expects to send out 250 more results letters by the end of December.
- ✓ ATSDR has begun a preliminary analysis of the test results for the first 1,000 participants in the testing program. ATSDR expects to present a summary of the analysis at the Community Advisory Group meeting in February, 2001.

For more information call:

ATSDR, Dan Strausbaugh at 1-406-293-2728.

MONTANIAN

Dec 27, 2000



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# Libby asbestos deaths 40-60 times higher than normal

A study of death certificates by the federal government reveals what many Libby residents already knew: A lot of people in Libby have died of asbestosis. The rate of deaths caused by exposure to asbestos from the former W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine between 1979 and 1998 was 40 to 60 times higher than average, according to the study, which gives the first statistical evidence of the effects of widespread asbestos contamination.

The study was released Dec. 14 by Steve Dearwent, an epidemiologist for the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, at the meeting of the Community Advisory Group. Dearwent explained that the study reviewed all death certificates in Libby from 1979 to 1998. Analysis then compared the death rates for asbestos-related diseases to national and state averages, and found a far higher death rate in Libby.

A detailed examination of 419 death certificates showed 11 conclusive asbestosis deaths in Libby during the period. That seemingly small number nonetheless reveals an asbestosis mortality rate 40 times higher than in the rest of Montana and 60 times higher than the national average, the report says. Four more deaths were attributed to a cancer of the lung lining, which may be asbestos-

related. "The increase in deaths due to asbestosis during the 20-year period examined in this review was statistically significant," said the report. "Excess asbestosis-related mortality strongly indicates that historical exposure to asbestos in Libby was much greater than in other areas of Montana or the United States."

Asbestos contamination from Grace's now-defunct vermiculite mine are suspected.

**"These findings support the community's and the media's perception that Libby residents have been adversely impacted by historical asbestos exposure."**

related to poisoning dozens of miners and residents during its operations. The company, which owned the mine that shut down 10 years ago, still faces dozens of lawsuits over asbestos poisoning and cleanup costs.

These findings support the community's and the media's perception that Libby residents have been adversely impacted by historical asbestos exposure, said the study's conclusion.

Deadly tremolite asbestos, which was a waste by-product of vermiculite, was released into the atmosphere in Libby during the years that Grace operated the

mine. Vermiculite was used mainly in insulation and potting soils. The study determined that deaths from lung cancer, digestive cancer and heart disease were not higher than normal during the same period. Also, overall mortality rates were not overly high in general during the period studied by the federal agency.

Dearwent, the ATSDR epidemiologist who wrote the report, said it was a bit surprising that the rates of lung cancer weren't higher than normal, given the unusually high rates of asbestosis. He's not sure what created that anomaly. Dearwent said he's often alarmed by mortality rates for certain diseases that are two or three times the normal rate. So to see asbestosis as 60 times the national average is astounding, he said.

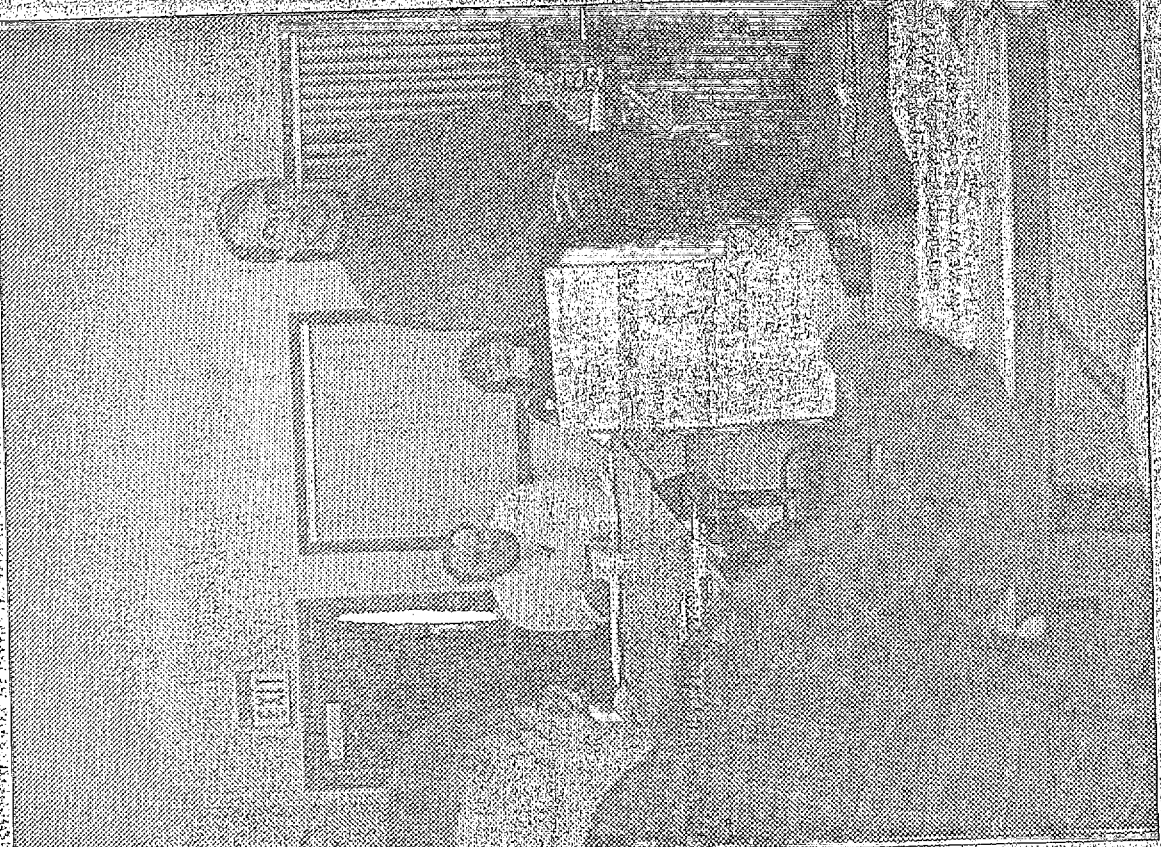
"I was taken aback when I saw those numbers," Dearwent said. Asked if the report proves a link between the mining operations and asbestosis deaths, Dearwent said he couldn't say scientifically but "with the rate being as high as it was, I think you can make that conclusion."

The study said the ill health effects of working and living around asbestos dust have long been established. It points to a link first documented in 1974.

Grace officials, meanwhile, have maintained during this controversy that they upheld strong safety regulations at the mine. But court depositions by Grace officials in civil lawsuits against the company show that the company knew of the danger to workers and took few steps to prevent it.

The potential exposure scenarios in this community include individuals with occupational exposure, family members of workers exposed through worker take-home, community members exposed through ambient environmental levels and residents exposed through the use of vermiculite as insulation in their homes or as a soil amendment in their gardens. The study said.

The study looked at deaths from 1979 to 1998 because asbestos poisoning occurred when the air pollution was at its worst during the 1950s through early 1970s, Dearwent said. Given the average life spans of people poisoned by asbestos, most would have died during the 20-year period under study, he said. Dearwent acknowledged that the study has flaws that limit the usefulness of the



Montanians photo by David E. Leland. Cyrus Lee, left, of the Community Advisory Group, questions Steve Dearwent of ATSDR about the study that showed a high rate of asbestosis deaths in Libby. See related story on this page. Pictured in background are Libby residents Tony Berger and Wendy Thom, community involvement coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

information it provides, except for statistical purposes.

For one thing, the study read only the death certificates of persons who lived within a 10-mile radius of Grace's export plant in downtown Libby at the time they died. This limitation excluded the town of Troy, where many Grace employees lived during the 20-year period covered by the study.

Neither did the study take into account the people who lived in Libby during the period covered by the study, who moved

away and died of asbestos-related diseases elsewhere.

Dearwent also pointed out that the only source of information was death certificates, and the study could not take account variables such as lifestyle habits that might have affected the results.

The study shows a need, Dearwent said, and he pointed out that this information can be used by Libby residents seeking aid from the federal government.

Wednesday, December 6

LIBBY — According to an article in the Daily Inter Lake, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health says Lincoln County had 23 documented deaths from asbestosis between 1968 and 1997.

MONTANIAN Dec 13, 2000

Dec 13, 2000

MONTANIAN



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** My home has vermiculite insulation in it. Will EPA ever be able to tell me whether my home is safe to live in?

**A:** EPA is working with other federal agencies and scientists to evaluate the safety of vermiculite. The Agency uses a risk assessment to estimate the risk of living in or being in a certain situation.

EPA's goals with regard to this are:

- 1 to determine whether amphibole (tremolite asbestos) fibers are more toxic than serpentine (chrysotile asbestos) fibers.
- 2 to analyze human and animal study data on asbestos-related illnesses to determine whether EPA can develop a model that helps predict the risk of developing cancer from exposure to tremolite asbestos.
- 3 to have an open forum for scientists of various backgrounds to review the theory and model.

Dr. Chriss Weis and Dr. Aubrey Miller will be in Libby on Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 13, 14. They will be happy to meet with you and discuss the status of the risk assessment or other questions and concerns you may have. Please call the EPA Information center at 293-6194 to make an appointment.

For more information, call

Dr. Chris Weis, Science Coordinator, at 303-312-6671

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator, at 406-441-1150 x241

# Morris is a "bad shot"

Editor:

Mr. Roger Morris [editor of the Western News] has most of the ink in this county, but unfortunately he abuses that privilege by using a poor patterned load for his editorial shotgun. His shot load scatters and is not in the least accurate. We refer to his editorial dated, Oct. 27,

2000.

He states, "It's disingenuous of Project 56 to bring their anti-federal government agenda to this issue without regularly attending the Citizens Advisory Group meetings and participating in the discussion. The only thing they can accomplish with this type of rheto-

ric is delaying the clean up efforts and extending the period of time that residents of this area are exposed to harmful materials."

Mr. Morris missed the clay bird. Our views on the federal government were printed in his paper back in April. We have no problem with our form of government. It is

the greatest in the world, past, present and future. It is certain administrations and non-elected bureaucrats who usurp our rights with whom we differ.

Morris uses the term "constitutionalists" as a dirty word. We are proud to be "constitutionalists." As for the city council having illegal meetings, it is our view that the new city attorney is attempting to keep the council on the straight and narrow. If they take his advice the matter will

become mute. [sic]

We don't mind your taking pot shots at us, but go back to the loading bench and develop a more accurate load. You have a very good and powerful shotgun at your disposal, but it takes good ammunition and constant practice to become a good shot.

Ken Short, Project 56

MONTANIAN

Dec 6, 2000



# The Mont

MONTANIAN

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY IN  
DEC 6, 2000

## Baucus brings toxicologist to Libby Nov. 29

U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., visited Libby with a toxicologist and director of the University of Montana's Center for Environmental Health Sciences to tour a health clinic and discuss asbestos-related issues with community leaders.

Baucus, who last visited Libby in late May, brought Dr. Andre Holian, a toxicologist and director of the UM center, to Libby Nov. 29 to tour Libby's Center for Asbestos Related Disease and ensure that Libby residents are getting adequate health care following exposure to asbestos fibers from a defunct vermiculite mine near Libby.

Baucus introduced Dr. Holian to Libby officials and residents. Dr. Holian is a leading scholar in the study of lung-related disease, and he has indicated he will spend some of his department budget to study Libby residents' asbestos-related disease processes. In July 2000, Dr. Holian became the first director of the Center for Environmental Health Sciences at the University of Montana.

"I want to make sure that Libby residents get the health care and attention they need," Baucus said. "That's why I invited Dr. Holian to Libby. He will be a valuable resource to the folks and leaders in Libby. And I want to make sure that all of our responses — federal, state and local — are coordinated so that we're efficient and sensitive in meeting the health needs of Libby residents affected by asbestos exposure."

Dr. Holian, Baucus said, is interested in creating studies to define asbestos-induced lung fibrosis in hopes of finding cures. He also is interested in defining populations that are susceptible to asbestos exposure, as well as the unique aspects of exposure to tremolite asbestos.

"I want to hear directly from the people of Libby to make sure the clean-up efforts are on track and that the folks involved are getting the care they need," Baucus added. "Cooperation and commitment at all levels of government is critical to ensure Libby's full recovery."

DEC 6, 2000

MONTANIAN



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** Why is EPA going to start taking more samples when many people haven't even gotten the results from sampling that was done last spring?

**A:** EPA regrets that there are some people who still have not received sampling results. The delay is caused by two circumstances:

1) EPA is holding the soil and insulation samples that were taken in April 2000 or later until we have completed a performance evaluation (PE Study) on the analytical techniques that are available to analyze the samples. Consistency and reliability problems using light microscopy have prompted EPA to get more appropriate techniques formally approved. EPA wants to make sure the results we give to people are the most accurate results we can get with today's technology. We want to have confidence in the measurement of asbestos that we give you. This will help us to better estimate what risk there may be from contaminated vermiculite in or around your home.

People whose homes were sampled in March should have received preliminary results on indoor air and dust samples last summer. No soil or insulation results were sent out from the March samples. No results were sent out on April samples.

2) One of the contractors that the EPA was working with, ISSI, Inc., had financial problems and went bankrupt. This has affected our work on several projects, one of them being management of our data base. Any information we have on the samples that were taken is saved, but has not been easily accessible. It will be January before we have a fully functional database again. EPA will make every effort to get all available sampling results out to people as soon as possible after the database is functional again.

If you have any questions about the meaning of the sampling results you have received, please call Paul Peronard, On-Scene Coordinator, at 303-312-6808 to discuss your results with him.

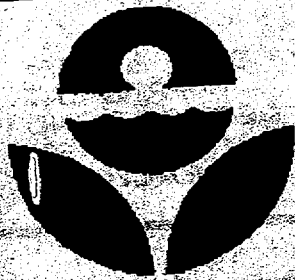
You may also call:

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator, at 406-441-1150 x241



Nov 27, 2000

MONTANIAN



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** What will EPA be working on now that the cleanup actions are being shut down for the winter?

**A:** The asbestos exposure investigation is being done in phases. EPA is currently finalizing plans to do Phase 2 of the Libby site investigation.

**Phase 1** of the investigation (all the sampling that has taken place to date) revealed tremolite asbestos fibers in some samples of indoor air, dust, soil, and insulation. The greatest emphasis has been placed on collection and analysis of air samples because inhalation poses the greatest health risk from asbestos. EPA collected most air samples using a stationary air monitor located in the principal living area of the home. The concentration of fibers was estimated using Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM). Phase 1 was necessary to determine whether there was need for an emergency response in residential areas in and around Libby.

**Phase 2** is intended to measure more specifically any asbestos exposure during residents' routine activities. Phase 2 tasks include:

- 1) measuring asbestos levels in the air when individuals are engaged in routine and special activities in and around Libby i.e., vacuuming, dusting, working in an attic, gardening, etc.;
- 2) comparing those measurements to data collected from stationary air monitors at the same location;
- 3) analyzing the air samples by both the TEM and PCM methods in order to see the relationship between the two;
- 4) determining which type of measurement is most appropriate; and
- 5) using the data to help assess health risk to people who engage in the types of routine and special activities investigated during the study.

EPA invites public comment on the Phase 2 Sampling and Quality Assurance Project Plan. The draft Plan can be found in the EPA information center or with any CAG member. Comments received by January 1st will be fully considered and may be incorporated into the final version of the Plan. EPA hopes to begin sampling in early February.

For more information call:

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator, at 406-441-1150 x241 or  
Dr. Chris Weis, Science Coordinator, at 303-312-6671.

MONTANIAN

NOV 29, 2000

## Asbestos support group fills

The support group for individuals who have been impacted by asbestos-related disease has reached its limit and has been temporarily closed to new participants.

According to group co-facilitators Ann Martin and Laura Sedler, "Response to the group has been very positive and we have reached the limit of the number of people we can effectively serve in one group."

Sedler said there has been interest in forming another group and funding is being sought to support additional meetings.

"Current funding has been through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under a temporary contract, but the need

has been recognized for long-term support for this resource," Sedler said.

"Several people have asked about a daytime group, since many of those with asbestosis do not have the stamina for evening meetings," Sedler said. "We are hoping to be able to add another group of this type early in the new year."

Anyone who is struggling with their own or a loved one's diagnosis of asbestos-related disease who might be interested in attending a group is urged to call Laura at 293-0180.

"It's important to hear from folks who are interested, so we can plan to meet the needs we see, and let them know when we have space available," Sedler said.



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

## **Q: What has ATSDR found out about participants in the medical testing program?**

**A:** ATSDR has received preliminary data from the Libby medical testing program, but not enough to draw conclusions about rates of asbestos-related illness among participants.

As of October 19, 2000, approximately 5,500 people were tested, with 65 percent of those individuals reporting a Libby zip code. Of those, 300 reported working at a W.R. Grace facility while 368 reported over work-related contact with vermiculite dust. 1,085 reported having lived in a household with a vermiculite worker.

The local radiologist reported abnormalities on the chest x-rays of 313 people. These individuals were referred to their personal physicians right away. (These immediate referrals were made predominantly for heart-related conditions, but 35 of the reports did note a thickening of the lining of the chest wall.)

So far, the chest x-rays for 429 participants have been reviewed by the two reviewing radiologists who are experts in asbestos-related disease. Each of the reviewers has referred approximately 40 individuals for further evaluation. We do not yet know whether the referrals overlap and, if so, how many overlap.

Results of the lung function test (which measures air capacity of the lungs) were available for 4,646 participants. After completing the lung function test, 12 participants were referred for immediate evaluation by a physician.

For the participants referred for further evaluation, it is important to note that it is not yet known whether the abnormalities detected in the lung function tests and in the chest x-rays are related to exposure to asbestos.

When participant information is more complete, ATSDR will present an interim report. This report is currently planned for January 2001.

For more information call: Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR, at 406-293-2728.

MONTANIAN

NOV 15, 2000

# Hospital CEO suggests changes in Grace medical plan

October 26, 2000

Stephen Kardos, M.D.  
Chief Executive Officer  
Health Network America  
187 Monmouth Parkway  
West Longbranch, NJ 07764

Dear Dr. Kardos:

In the spirit of viewing the glass as half full and following your suggestion, here are specific changes we believe should be made to the Grace Medical Plan.

1) The eligibility for receiving benefits under the plan version 03 changes "12 consecutive months" to "6 cumulative months."

2) The section of the plan beginning on page 5 entitled "Qualifying Medical Condition" is removed. It is confusing and not necessary because the plan specifies under "Covered Conditions" the qualifying medical criteria to justify or not reimbursement for medical expenses.

3) The plan will reimburse

100% any covered medical expense for eligible individuals as prescribed or ordered by a licensed physician whose primary practice location is Lincoln County, Montana or a board certified pulmonologist.

4) Annual checkups and screening, or as frequently as deemed necessary by the physician is a covered benefit. This will ensure that all eligible individuals would be provided with the means for early detection, treatment and ongoing monitoring of disease manifestation.

5) Individual and family counseling by social workers or licensed professional counselors is a covered benefit.

6) Home Health care and Hospice care is a covered benefit upon a physician's order for these services. The Medicare definition of "home bound" is not necessary for Home Health or Hospice to be covered. This benefit will include reimbursement for personal care and

homemaking services, rehabilitation and respiratory therapy as indicated by the patient's condition.

7) Prescription drugs prescribed by a physician will be reimbursed at the 90% percentile for community pharmacies.

8) Respite care within a hospital or other appropriate facility for up to five consecutive days is a covered benefit.

9) Emergency transport to the closest, licensed acute care hospital capable of adequately treating the patient's condition is a covered benefit.

10) Home evaluations for the purposes of adapting the home to achieve maximum independence and usability for activities of daily living is a covered benefit.

11) Admittance to a long term care facility or assisted living facility upon physician order is a covered service.

12) Preventive treatments and medicines, and necessary tests and procedures prescribed by the physi-

cian as judged to be beneficial in preventing further compromise of an eligible individual's health because of ARD are a covered benefit.

In addition to the above changes, we believe the company's plan needs to include the following:

1) The establishment of reserves and compliance with all federal and state laws including ERISA requirements.

2) The perpetuity of the plan needs to be insured through a trust mechanism or some other guaranty of funding indefinitely into the future.

3) The final decision of any medical dispute would be decided by a physician mutually agreed to by the eligible individual and the company.

Dr. Kardos, if these changes and additions are included in the Grace Medical Benefit Plan Version 4, the company will have traveled a

long way towards its commitment of "doing the right thing." Thank you for your consideration of these additions.

On behalf of the CAG and all residents of Lincoln County, I remain sincerely,

**Richard Palagi, MSHA**  
CEO, St. John's  
Lutheran Hospital, Libby

NOV 8, 2000

MONTANIAN



# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I've heard that Lincoln County is developing a registry of vermiculite insulated homes and structures in our country. What benefit will there be for me to put my name on this list?

**A:** The program's purpose is to create a database of vermiculite-insulated structures, listing the number, location, size and condition of these buildings.

The information will help:

- A. identify areas where there may be higher risk for asbestos exposure.
- B. spot structures which may need more materials or air sampling.
- C. Identifying potential need for additional ambient air monitoring sites.
- D. Providing baseline information on the scope and size of any future cleanup or removal programs.

Your participation will help Lincoln County secure funding to conduct home and air sampling. The registry could lead to help for removal or cleanup of insulation, depending on the results of the EPA's risk assessment.

To obtain a registry form or for answers to your questions concerning the program, contact the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department at 293-7781 ext. 228. Their office is located at 418 Mineral Ave. in Libby.

You may also contact EPA's Community Involvement Coordinator,  
Wendy Thomi, at 406-441-1150 ext. 241

**MONTANIAN**

**NOV 8, 2000**

Nov 1, 2000

LIBBY — State medical officer Dr. Michael Spence, M.D., estimates that the asbestos medical screening in Libby could find up to 900 Libby residents and former residents with asbestos-related lung disease. Spence gave this estimate because 15 percent of the people tested showed immediate signs of asbestos-related symptoms.

When the testing ends Nov. 2, about 6,800 people will have undergone chest x-rays and lung-function tests. Persons who showed symptoms of asbestosis, mesothelioma or lung cancer were notified by telephone. Other persons receive

a written report by mail.

Spence's predicted diagnosis is in addition to the 400 Libby-area residents who have already been diagnosed and treated by Dr. Alan Whitehouse of Spokane.

Initial results of the medical testing, which was conducted by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, are to be released at the Nov. 1 meeting of the Community Advisory Group, 7 p.m. at the Libby City Hall Ponderosa Room.



# Candidate pledges support for asbestos victims

MONTANIAN NOV 1, 2000

The Democratic candidate for governor became the first to respond to a questionnaire seeking candidates' positions on asbestos issues.

Mark O'Keefe said in a press release Oct. 30 that, if he is elected governor, he will continue to work in the interest of Montana families affected by asbestos, not the "special interests," O'Keefe said.

O'Keefe's promise came in response to a letter from Gayla Benefield of Libby Asbestos Victims Relief Organization on behalf of more than 200 Libby-area residents to the candidates in statewide races in the Nov. 7 election. The letter asked candidates if they would reject contributions from asbestos companies and whether they support asbestos legislation in Congress.

"I have not received nor will I accept contributions from the asbestos industry," O'Keefe said. "All Montanians deserve a governor who will work for Montana family interests, not special interests. The situation in Libby is a good example why Montana needs an independent governor."

As of Monday, Oct. 30, no other candidate had responded to Benefield's

letter.

O'Keefe also said he would oppose congressional measures that would limit the liability of asbestos companies or restrict health access to health care for victims of asbestos-related illnesses.

O'Keefe, the state auditor and insurance commissioner, said that when the Libby situation surfaced late last year, his office was one of the first to demand that Montana's congressional delegation kill efforts to pass S. 758, a federal measure called the Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act.

"That bill unfairly restricted the rights of Montanians to our state court system and actually prolonged Libby-area residents' efforts to the litigation process," O'Keefe said. "It also severely restricted what victims of asbestos-related diseases could receive in compensatory damages from responsible parties - W.R. Grace in the instance of Libby residents."

O'Keefe said Montana law requires that injured workers get care regardless of proven liability, a provision that would be reversed if the congressional legislation had passed. Asbestos legislation could reverse that, mandating

that liability be established before an injured worker could receive health care.

"That's wrong," O'Keefe said. "As governor, I will fight any measure that would take away the rights of injured workers to receive health care. We must do what everything possible help protect the workers and their families."

O'Keefe said state and federal officials should not delay any comprehensive asbestos cleanup. Authorities should ensure that Libby residents are no longer exposed to asbestos, O'Keefe said, adding that the state should work closely with the federal agencies to ensure cleanup is done quickly.

"Grace should ultimately be held accountable for the cost, but the cleanup needs to happen now," O'Keefe wrote to Libby residents.

O'Keefe also said leadership at the Montana Department of Environmental Quality should return to its mission of protecting Montana and the health of its citizens by reducing environmental dangers. DEQ leadership has strayed from its mission of protecting Montanians' health.





# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** When can we expect the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry to report on the final results of asbestos medical testing now underway in Libby?

**A:** November 2000 — As individuals results are sent to participants, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) will begin providing updates on the number of people tested and the percentage of individuals with abnormal test results. Because these updates are based on increasing numbers of respondents, the percentage of abnormal results may change over time. Preliminary information will be presented at the November 1 Community Advisory Group meeting.

January 2001 — ATSDR will issue the first formal report summarizing preliminary information from the first 3,000 participants receiving x-rays and lung-function tests. This report will contain information on the number of abnormalities observed.

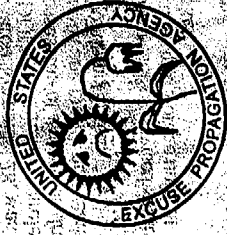
June 2001 — ATSDR will release a report summarizing data gathered from all respondents who participated in the medical testing program.

MONTANIAN NOV 1, 2000

For more information, call

ATSDR, Dan Holcomb at 1-888-42-ATSDR

This ad is paid for by Project 56, P.O. Box 387, Libby, MT 59923, David Griffiths president



# ASK EPA... AGAIN!!!

## Questions and TRUE Answers About Asbestos and EPA's Actions

**Q:** EPA recently issued a statement regarding the asbestos exposure of the people of Libby brought about by the actions of EPA. Your statement was that we are not being exposed to dangerous levels of contamination caused by the cleanup operations mandated by the EPA's Unilateral Order. Is this statement true?

**A:** NO!!! That is untrue, fiction, fantasy, a fabrication that we concocted to lull you into a false sense of security. Air monitoring done in conjunction with the cleanup has detected airborne asbestos fibers as a result of the cleanup, fibers that we know can remain airborne for up to 4.5 miles. EPA has always taken the position that there is absolutely NO safe level of exposure, NO risk protocols have been developed, NO minimum exposure limits have been set for non-occupational exposure, and NO dose response curve exists for asbestos toxicity. This stuff will kill you!!! The ONLY place we initially detected fibers was at the cleanup site, which means you were not being exposed until we started stirring up contaminated soil. We did have options to effect a remediation that would not expose every man, woman and child to a substance so deadly, but it would have meant actually informing the public of the risks. It was more expedient to just lie about it. **WR GRACE** We are doing everything in our power to push this cleanup through before the health screening is finished so we can blame the results of our actions on WR Grace. You will see an increase in a variety of lethal and sub-lethal health problems over the next 10-20 years, but only in a non-occupational setting, that is, not to EPA workers but only to the people who lived in Libby. Fifteen years from now we intend to "discover" a report detailing the harm we imposed on Libby. We will then mobilize all of our resources to "save" the people whose health has been affected by our actions today. This will include: an expanded cemetery, more ambulances, and FREE oxygen-bottle carts. We will petition Congress to free up funds to mitigate the damages and this town will boom once more. You can use those funds, no strings attached for necessities like a year-round circus, a mountain climbing center, and a bigger, better courtroom for all the lawsuits brought against us. Because at EPA, the love of money outweighs the value of human life, even if protection is our middle name.

For more info call: Wendi Thoml at 406-441-1150 ext 241  
or Paul Peronard 1-303-312-6808  
For the TRUTH call: DC Or 1-406-293-4702

MONTANIAN

OCT 25, 00

# Libby Community Advisory Group Meeting Summary October 12, 2000

By Gerald Mueller of Consensus Associates of Missoula, Mont.

## Introductions

Gerald Mueller and Libby Community Advisory Group (CAG) members present introduced themselves. Members in attendance were Clinton Maynard, Dan Strausbaugh, Leroy Thom, Gayla Benefield, Wendy Thom, John Constan, Wilbur Wilson, David F. Latham, George Baiser, Bob Dedrick, Brad Black, Paul Peronard, Cyrus Lee, Bob Tunis, Kerry Beasley, Rick Palagi, Rita Windom, Sandy Wagner, Ron Anderson, Norita Skramstad, Lloyd Doug Williamson.

## Agenda

Mr. Mueller reviewed an agenda for this meeting including the following topics:

- St. John's Lutheran Hospital Grant Request
- CAG Letters
- EPA Report
- ATSDR Report
- County Report
- Health Network America Presentation
- Public Comment

## St. John's Lutheran Hospital Report

Rick Palagi reported that the Intermountain Administrators have been retained to help establish the medical trust.

## Grant Request

Laura Sedler, the Asbestos Group Facilitator, reported on and asked for the CAG's support for a Rural Health Outreach Grant proposal being submitted to the to the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. Ms. Sedler had previously supplied an abstract of the grant proposal that had been mailed to CAG members with the September 28 meeting summary.

The grant would provide for continuing funding for the Libby Community Center for Asbestos Related Diseases administered jointly by the Lincoln County Health Board, the Western Montana Mental Health Center, and St. John's Hospital. Current funding provided from private sources runs out in February 2001. If the grant is approved, the Center would be staffed by a doctor and nurse with expertise in asbestos-related disease and a mental health clinician from the Montana State Community Mental Health Services center. The doctor and nurse would conduct on-going assessments, coordinate each patient's medical resources, administer immunizations, monitor new treatment therapies, and provide patient education and guidance in disease management and lifestyle modification. The mental health clinician would conduct screening to identify patient need for and access to adjunctive mental health services and would be available for initial counseling to support a healthy adjustment process. The center would also operate ongoing peer support groups, facilitated by mental health and social services professionals. The support groups will serve to identify and relieve sources of chronic stress, address issues of grief and loss, initiate and support behavior modification efforts, and establish a forum for peer teaching about living with asbestos related disease.

**\*CAG Action-** The CAG voted unanimously to support a seconded motion to support the grant request as described by Ms. Sedler. Individual CAG members then signed a letter of support for the grant.

## CAG Letters

Gerald Mueller reported that as directed by the CAG at its September 28, 2000 meeting, he wrote letters to Senators Baucus and Burns requesting federal funds immediately for Libby people who need financial support to obtain treatment for asbestos-related disease. Mr. Mueller, again at the CAG's direction, wrote to the Lincoln County Health Board to encourage it to do all within its powers to secure necessary medical and environmental monitoring, screening, and treatment programs with all deliberate speed. Copies of the letters to the Senators and the Board of Health were provided to CAG members with the September 28, 2000 CAG meeting summary. Finally, Mr. Mueller reported that he sent letters to Governor Racicot and Representative Paul Clark requesting their assistance in obtaining access for EPA from W.R. Grace to the mine and Kootenai Development Corporation (KDC) properties for disposal of asbestos contaminated waste and cleanup.

The CAG received a response from Representative Aubyn Curtiss to its letter regarding EPA access to the mine and KDC properties. Rep. Curtiss indicated a willingness to write to W.R. Grace as requested by the CAG and asked for a name and address of a W.R. Grace official. Mr. Mueller replied and suggested that Rep. Curtiss write to Alan Stringer.

## EPA Report

Paul Peronard, on behalf of EPA, reported on the following subjects.

**EPA Contractor Failure**  
An EPA contractor, ISSI, recently went out of business. ISSI had been responsible for toxicological support, conducting the risk assessment, maintaining the clean-up data base, and community support. Payment of some subcontractors will be delayed as a result, including the Libby VFW chapter for the use of its facility for the recent Libby asbestos conference. Letters containing the results of the July and August air sampling will also be delayed until EPA can hire a new contractor and resume work on the data base.

## Mine and KDC Property Access

No hearing date has been set yet regarding EPA's suit against W.R. Grace to obtain access to the mine and KDC properties. EPA hopes a date will be set next week. Briefs and motions have been filed.

## Cleanups

Excavation work has been completed at the screening plant, and preliminary restoration work has begun. The site will be buttoned up for winter by the first week in November. The clean-up crew has been reduced from 22 to 11. If the court does not grant EPA access by October 18, the KDC properties will remain untouched through the winter. About five to six weeks of work are necessary at these properties. Concerning the export plant site, Millwork West has been moved and is opened for business at the Highway 2 site. W.R. Grace is almost finished cleaning the third building. Cleaning the dirt under the building floor is underway. Debris on the west side of the export site has been moved to the mine. Excavation of contaminated soil will begin on October 16. Additional air sampling will be conducted to ensure that the excavation does not result in asbestos moving through the air off of the site. Excavation should be completed by the end of November or the first part of December.

## Air Monitoring

At the export plant, one monitoring sample taken at the work area perimeter detected one asbestos fiber and a resulting concentration of 0.0025 fibers per cubic centimeter. EPA attributed this reading to the cleanup and increased dust suppression. At the screening plant, fibers were detected

on the Highway 37 side of the property, probably from Rainy Creek Road.

## Tunis Letter

At its September 14 meeting, the CAG voted to support Bob Tunis' letter to EPA requesting funding for a survey that would measure the impact of the current W.R. Grace situation on the economy of Libby and area and isolate these effects from other problems affecting the Libby community. EPA believes that the Brownfields grant could be used for this purpose and would be the best vehicle by which to request the money.

## CAG Member Question - Will Libby be added to the Super Fund National Priority List (NPL)?

Answer - Work now underway is being conducted under the time critical removal action provisions of the federal Superfund law. The risk assessment will clarify whether additional clean-up activity and adding Libby to the NPL is warranted.

## CAG Member Question - How will the failure of ISSI affect the timing of completion of the risk assessment?

Answer - An ISSI subcontractor, Dr. Berman, and EPA's Chris Weiss are responsible for the risk assessment. Given ISSI's demise, the risk assessment will probably be broken into the following pieces:

- Update of the literature,
- Reconciliation of the literature with different types of asbestos;
- Construction of a new mathematical model to predict risk of diseases such as mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestos;
- Peer review of the mathematical model; and
- Application of the model to Libby.

Peer review should begin in January or February.

## CAG Member Question - How much material is being removed from the Rain Tree Nursery site?

Answer - We expect to remove about 60,000 to 70,000 cubic yards or about 100,000 tons of material. We expect about another 30,000 cubic yards from the KDC properties.

## CAG Member Question - Has the railroad property on the west side of the bull park been sampled?

Answer - We have not sampled under the tracks and hope we it won't be necessary because of the disruption to rail service that would result. We have sampled along the railroad line across the river, and no fibers were detected. Vermiculite contaminated with asbestos was found on top of the bluff above the tracks.

## Audience Question - Has EPA sampled the Rain Tree Nursery site for pesticides?

Answer - Yes. Results are due back tomorrow, October 13.

## Audience Question - Have the liability concerns expressed by W.R. Grace been addressed?

Answer - Yes. This is the first time anyone has raised this issue at a Superfund cleanup. EPA and its contractors are insured. However, W.R. Grace will remain liable for the clean-up and any other related costs.

## Audience Question - Will W.R. Grace grant access to EPA if no pesticide problem is found?

Answer - Alan Stringer stated that the access question has been referred to the courts. EPA said that other disposal alternatives including adding a cell to the Lincoln County landfill and shipment to Spokane are being considered so that cleanup and disposal can proceed if access to the mine is not granted by the courts. The County has stated its willingness to consider use of its landfill if necessary.

## ATSDR Report

Dan Strausbaugh reported on behalf of ATSDR, and addressed the following topics.

## Medical Testing

The number of calls from people scheduling an appointment in advance of the October 20 deadline increased significantly this past week indicating the success of the newspaper, radio and television ads notifying people of the medical testing deadline. Next week, handbills will be posted around town advertising the October 20 deadline.

As of the week ending September 23, 4,696 people have been screened and the total appointments made was 5,908. An additional 68 appointments have been made for people living in Elko, Nevada.

## CAG Member Question - The ATSDR office will not be open on October 20, so people should call for their appointments by October 19.

## Medical Testing Letters

The first batch of 140 to 150 letters reporting screening results were sent to physicians during the last week of September. Letter were mailed to participants during the week of Oct. 6. A sample letter sent to participants who had normal results was passed out to CAG members. Patients with abnormal results would receive letters with a different second page containing one or more of the following statements:

- "You reported the following symptom(s) during your interview..."
- Chest X-Ray - One or more views found (condition identified by code number), and
- Pulmonary Function Test - The test response is reported by code number.

**CAG Member Comment - People receiving the letters are confused about the status of their health and are seeking clarification from St. John's Hospital, including interpretations of X-Rays. The Hospital is not funded to provide such clarifications.**

## CAG Member Comment - Each page of each letter should have an identifier to avoid having letters be mixed up.

## CAG Member Question - Will the letters contain the X-Rays and pulmonary function test results?

Answer - Yes, the letters to the patient physicians will contain the complete package of X-Rays and other test results. The medical testing results will be sent to the participant if they did not designate a personal physician.

## CAG Member Question - Will the letters be sent out chronologically based on appointment dates?

Answer - Yes. Letters will be sent out in batches corresponding to a week of screening appointments, about 500 at a time.

## CAG Member Question - Is the contact telephone number the same for the people in Elko, Nevada?

Answer - Yes.

## Preliminary Medical Testing Results

Sharon Campolucci is planning to attend the November 1 CAG meeting to present preliminary medical testing results such as the number of critical care referrals and the total number of people tested. This information will be presented via an overhead not a written report. These preliminary results will not differentiate between asbestos and non-asbestos related disease. It should also be remembered that the preliminary data may not be representative of the complete sample of all the screening results.

## CAG Member Question - Will the preliminary results be published in the press or anywhere else?

Answer - No.

## CAG Member Comment - It would be helpful to report the preliminary data by age and work-related or non-work-related exposure.

**CAG Member Comment - Data from ATSDR indicates that about 55% of a sample of just over a 1,000 people screened have no medical insurance.**

## CAG Member Comment - The question about having or not having health insurance was not asked of everyone screened. The point at which the question began to be asked should be specified.

**CAG Member Comment - The insurance information should be broken down by type of insurance including HMO or private insurance and by deductible amount to help understand the need for financial assistance for those needing medical treatment.**

## CAG Member Comment - Diana Hammer had her baby and the CAG facilitator should send her a letter of congratulation.

## County Report

Commissioner Rita Windom reported that the County is moving forward cautiously in considering the proposal to form the advisory and planning board. Ron Anderson reported that in response to the CAG's recommendation, the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners is implementing a Vermiculite Insulation Registry Program that will be administered through the County Environmental Health Department. The purpose of the program is to develop a database inventory of structures that contain vermiculite insulation. Information entered into the Registry will provide detailed data on the location, size and condition of vermiculite insulated structures in Lincoln County. The program will be strictly voluntary, but anyone owning or occupying a vermiculite insulated structure is encouraged to participate. Questions concerning the program may be directed to the County Commissioners (293-7781 Extension 207) or to the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department (293-7781 Extension 228/FAX 293-5640).

## Health Network America (HNA) Presentation

Using the handouts included in Appendix 2, Dr. Kardos reported on HNA's administration of the W.R. Grace medical plan. Dr. Kardos stated that HNA is not an insurance company and only administers the plan. HNA does not profit based on the percentage of claims paid. HNA is also not the decision maker about the contents of the plan; W.R. Grace decides on plan content. Because the ATSDR medical screening program results will not be available to all those screened by the end of the year, HNA will recommend that W.R. Grace extend the grace period of coverage retroactively beyond the end of the year to 12/31/00.

## CAG Member Question - Why is there an enrollment deadline?

Answer - There is no enrollment deadline. The grace period refers to retroactive coverage of medical bills for people who enroll in the plan. People who enroll before the end of the grace period will receive payment for their medical treatment back to January 1, 2000.

Dr. Kardos stated that the W.R. Grace plan is primary and the federal Medicare program is secondary because patient payments will be higher with Medicare secondary.

(See CAG on page 10)



# CAG from page 4

**CAG Member Comment** - We are working with Medicare to assure that having the W.R. Grace plan primary will not jeopardize Medicare payments. At this time we don't have this assurance from Medicare.

Dr. Kardos said that the W.R. Grace plan pays only for treatment needed for asbestos-related diseases. HNA is working on claims reporting with St. John's Hospital to ensure that asbestos-related treatment is compensated. Dr. Kardos and Rick Palagi are also working on a letter of agreement to address the fee schedule. The 90% reference in the reimbursement rate means that 90% of the doctors in either the HIAA or MDR survey would accept the reimbursement as total payment for the service rendered.

**CAG Member Question** - Are the 10% of the doctors that would not accept the reimbursement as total payment best dollars?

**Answer** - Not necessarily. Highest cost does not necessarily mean the best service. Many other factors including competition affect what doctors charge.

Dr. Kardos reported that to date 45 people

have requested W.R. Grace medical plan applications. 25 people have applied and all 25 have been accepted into the program. He urged people to enroll the plan.

**CAG Member Comment** - People have not enrolled in the plan because they don't trust W.R. Grace.

**CAG Member Comment** - People think the qualification criterion in the W.R. Grace plan are too strict, and therefore they don't sign up.

**CAG Member Comment** - St. John's Hospital has advocated that the plan include wellness provisions that in the long run will reduce treatment costs.

**Response** - The plan only pays for treatment of asbestos-related illness.

**Audience Member Comment** - The plan does not include mental health benefits.

**CAG Member Comment** - The plan prescription benefits are inadequate. Libby drug stores cannot afford to participate.

**Response** - HNA will discuss the prescription benefit provisions with W.R. Grace.

**CAG Member Comment** - Another reason

people have not enrolled is that they have not received assurance that those who have filed suit against W.R. Grace will not somehow harm their legal position by enrolling.

**Response** - Medical records must be kept confidential by federal law.

**Audience Member Comment** - Back in April, the Sullivan law firm wrote to W.R. Grace lawyers asking that W.R. Grace give specific assurance that the legal position of those filing suits not be harmed by enrolling in the medical plan. No response has been received.

**Answer** - HNA will recommend to W.R. Grace that they respond to this letter and clarify that those filing suit not be disadvantaged by enrolling in the medical plan.

**CAG Member Comment** - The home care and hospice provisions found on pages 15-19 of the W.R. Grace plan are not adequate.

**CAG Member Comment** - The W.R. Grace plan could end at any time. We need up front money based on an actuarial analysis in a trust to assure that treatment will continue to be available.

**Response** - The frequency and intensity of asbestos-related disease in Libby is not

known. An actuarial analysis will therefore not be accurate. The amount of funding in the trust would have to be updated at least every five years.

**CAG Member Comment** - Five areas of deficiencies in the W.R. Grace medical plan have been repeatedly communicated to W.R. Grace, but they have not been corrected. The deficiencies are a continuing source of frustration with the plan. The five areas are: plan eligibility criteria, home and hospice care, mental health coverage and wellness, screening and follow-up evaluation, and up front funding.

**Response** - Dr. Kardos stated that if people would send a detailed list of changes that should be made in the plan, HNA will submit them to a blue ribbon panel of three of four of the country's best asbestos physicians. These physicians will not be in the employ of W.R. Grace. The qualifications of the panelists will be sent to the CAG. HNA will take the recommendations from the panel for plan changes to W.R. Grace. Dr. Kardos will attempt to have a response to the list of problems back to the CAG at its December 14 meeting. Alan Stringer agreed that W.R. Grace will consider changes to the plan recommended by HNA as a result of this process.

**CAG Member Comment** - W.R. Grace should bring its excess insurance carrier into the discussion.

**\* CAG Action** - The CAG agreed unanimously that a detailed list of changes needed in the W.R. Grace plan should be sent to Dr. Kardos.

**CAG Member Comment** - The data on insurance coverage from the medical screening, i.e. 55% lack medical insurance, demonstrate that people need financial assistance. People without insurance will not seek treatment for their asbestos-related diseases. While the W.R. Grace plan has deficiencies that should be corrected, anyone not getting medical care because they can't afford it should make use of the plan.

**CAG Member Comment** - W.R. Grace should continue to advertise the availability of the plan in simple terms that people can readily understand.

**Next Meeting**  
The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2000 from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room of the Libby City Hall.



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** Will the Libby Community Advisory Group continue to meet about asbestos issues through the holidays?

**A:** Yes. The Community Advisory Group will continue to meet although they have decided to meet only once per month for the rest of the year 2000.

The Group met on October 12. There will be **no meeting on October 26**. You may review the meeting summaries on the EPA web page at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/region08/superfund/>

**The November meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 1st in the Council Chambers at City Hall in Libby from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

**Agenda items include:**

- a presentation by ATSDR on the process used and timing of the release of results, both individual and overall trends for Libby.
- a presentation by MSU of services available to the Libby community such as assistance in better understanding the technical/scientific aspect of EPA's investigations and cleanups.

**The December meeting will be held on Thursday, December 14th in the Ponderosa Room at City Hall in Libby from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

If you have any questions about the CAG or EPA's actions in Libby,

- 1) Call Wendy Thomi, 406-441-1150 x241 or Paul Peronard, 303-312-6808
- 2) Look at the EPA web page at the above address.
- 3) Stop by the EPA Information Center at 501 Mineral Ave. Monday-Friday.

MONTANIAN

OCT 18, 00



# ASK EPA!!

Questions and Answers about  
Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I recently participated in the asbestos medical testing in Libby. Why does it take three or more months to receive my personal test results?

**A:** Your testing consisted of several parts. Some of the tests involve several steps and require a lengthy review by the doctors interpreting them. We want to ensure that each part is analyzed and interpreted correctly. Following is a description of the process.

✓ First, your x-rays are reviewed locally, which takes about a week. If the local reviewer believes your x-rays show a possible urgent medical condition, you will be called immediately.

Next, your x-rays are sent to three separate experts experienced in reading x-rays for evidence of asbestos exposure. The set of x-rays is carefully controlled as it moves from reviewer to reviewer. It takes about two months to complete the separate reviews of the x-rays.

✓ Finally, the results of your x-ray reviews, lung-function test, and health interview are combined into one report. You receive this report about three months after your appointment. When you receive the report, you may wish to review your results with your personal physician. If your test shows any abnormalities, your physician may suggest that you undergo additional testing to further evaluate your health before making recommendations for your personal health care.

For more information, call:

ATSDR, Dan Holcomb at 1-888-42-ATSDR

EPA, Wendy Thoni at 406-441-1150 x241

**To schedule an appointment, call 1-800-439-8308 by October 19, 2000**

Say

**YES**

**To the Test!**



**DON'T DELAY! October 20, 2000  
is the last day  
to make your appointment for  
FREE ASBESTOS MEDICAL TESTING**

**If you...**

- ⊙ **Lived**
- ⊙ **Worked**
- ⊙ **Played, or**
- ⊙ **Went to school**

**In Libby, MT for at least 6 months  
prior to December 31, 1990.**

**For information, call the Agency for Toxic Substances  
and Disease Registry (ATSDR) at 1-800-439-8308**

The asbestos testing program is part of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project sponsored by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on ATSDR or its role in this project, contact the headquarters in Atlanta, GA at 1-888-42-ATSDR.

**ATSDR**

**AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY**

*MONTANIAN*

*OCT 18, '00*



SAY YES to the Test!

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**ATSDR**

**AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY**

*MONTANIAN*

*OCT 11, 2000*

# Grace medical plan: *First payments leave asbestos victims with unpaid hospital bills*

By David F. Latham,  
editor of The Montanian

St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby has received its first statement of payments from the medical plan offered by W.R. Grace & Co. for medical services to asbestos patients, and the plan falls far short of the company's pledge to pay "100 percent" of victims' medical bills.

According to hospital CEO Rick Palagi, the hospital received its first notice of payment the week of Sept. 28.

"We have received one remittance notice ... on two patients who had charges and it appears that the plan pays about 68 percent of those patient charges, leaving the balance to be picked up by patients," Palagi said in an interview Sept. 29.

"Initial review of this first statement we got from them would give us a percentage that is very close to what Medicare reimburses. Medicare has struggled to make reimbursements to hospitals and providers that would actually cover the cost of providing the service," Palagi said.

The two patients will receive bills totaling \$338.65, Palagi said.

"These couple of patients have a bill and I'm required by law to bill them," he said.

Palagi said there might be some recourse for the patients.

"The patients' recourse would be, if they have other kinds of insurance, they

could submit the balance to that insurance," Palagi said. "My understanding would be, they couldn't submit this to Medicare because it was submitted to HNA first and Medicare requires that you submit to them first."

The Grace medical plan is administered by Health Network America (HNA), a privately owned and operated company in New Jersey.

Palagi said there were no ineligible expenses and the plan paid at least part of every expense that was submitted, but paid the hospital less than it charged on several items. The conflict arises from the prices the hospital charges versus what HNA says it will pay.

"For example, there was a chest x-ray, single view, done at the bedside with a portable machine. Our usual charge for that is \$147 and [HNA] said they would pay \$59," Palagi said.

Grace's representative in Libby, Alan Stringer, said Libby's hospital just charges too much for some services.

"There is an issue here with some of the charges the hospital has made," Stringer said in an interview Sept. 29.

"Our program says it will pay 100 percent of [what is] reasonable and customary. No plan, no insurance, nobody out there can in clear conscience pay 100 percent of what anybody wants to charge," Stringer said.

But Palagi disagrees.

"I have data to tell us we are competitive in our charges and not out of line,"

Palagi said.

Stringer, meanwhile, says the plan is up front about what it will pay.

"The plan has said from the beginning it will pay 100 percent of what is reasonable and customary," Stringer said. "You have to ask the hospital why are their charges so much higher than what is reasonable and customary for ... the Libby area."

Stringer says the 'reasonable and customary' clause is stated plainly in the plan and there was never any attempt to conceal it.

"It's right up front in the plan. People should take a look and read what the plan says," Stringer said.

Grace spent several tens of thousands of dollars in April to advertise its medical plan in newspapers across Montana, including The Montanian. The ads said the company would pay "100 percent of medical expenses" but Grace made no reference to 'reasonable and customary' in the ads.

The widespread perception at the time the ads came out was that patients would not incur any expenses of their own. But the head of HNA says that perception is wrong.

"That was really incorrect," said Dr. Steve Kardos, M.D., a pediatrician and the CEO, owner and founder of HNA.

"I think the word 'eligible' in there is really what is important," Kardos said.

(see **BILLS** on page 4)

## Last day to make appointment for the free asbestos medical testing is Oct. 20

Libby-area residents have until Oct. 20 to set an appointment for free asbestos medical testing. Residents can call 1-800-439-8308 to find out if they are eligible.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which began the medical testing program on July 5, has tested over 4,500 people to date with over 1,000 more scheduled to participate. The last day of tests is scheduled for Nov. 2.

The purpose of the medical testing program is to evaluate the current health status of those people who were present in Libby during the period of highest exposure to asbestos. The program, designed by ATSDR, includes a face-to-face interview, chest X-rays and lung-function tests. Test results are to participants approximately three months after testing.

To be eligible for medical testing, a person must have:

- Lived, worked or played in Libby for at least six months before Dec. 31, 1990, or,
- Be a former employee or the W.R. Grace/Zonolite company in the Libby area or a household member of a former employee.

The medical testing program was initiated as a service to the community as part of the Libby Community Environmental Health Project, a cooperative effort between ATSDR, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and the Lincoln County Environmental Health Department.

ATSDR is a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR is responsible for preventing or reducing the harmful effects of exposure to hazardous substances on human health and quality of life.

For more about the medical testing program, call the ATSDR office in Libby at (406) 293-7781 ext. 279.

# BILLS

(from page 1)

"The purpose of this plan is to provide health benefits to all of the people who were exposed and have become eligible for participation in the plan under the definitions of who is covered in the plan, and the eligibility is spelled out in the plan document," Kardos said.

"In addition to that, the fees

that are going to be paid by the plan are defined in the plan and they are based on the amount of usual and customary charge as determined by ... the greater fee from two national fee schedules, one being the Medical Data Research Institute fee schedule, and the other is the Health Insurance Association of America," Kardos said.

"The fee schedule, which is based upon 'usual and customary,' the percentile that Grace has opted as the administrator of the plan to pay is the highest of the fee schedules that has been collected

by these two data sources," he said.

"For instance, in the bills that have been submitted for payment by the physicians and the hospital for the most part, all of their fees have been [paid] in full as defined by the fee schedules that are being used by Grace. They're very high," Kardos said.

"The one instance in which we found an exorbitant fee, it was not paid and it was paid at the 90th percentile. It was a radiology fee charged by the hospital for a single-view x-ray for \$147 we believe, and that was paid at the 90th percentile ... for that procedure at a hospital," Kardos said.

Limits have to be set to prevent exploitation of the plan, Kardos said.

"The reason that a fee schedule is absolutely necessary in the administration of this plan, which was chosen to be a very, very rich one, is because then ... Grace would be getting bills and charges submitted that would be beyond reason and there would be no limit to what anybody could charge for any fee," he said.

"This plan has been implemented and executed by our company in a way that is far richer than any other plan that we administer ... so for ... anyone to suggest that this fee schedule is not living up to the promise is really sad because it doesn't indicate really what the dynamics are that are going on," Kardos said.

Palagi said Kardos — who lives in New Jersey — is out of touch with the problems and chal-

lenges of rural medicine.

"Dr. Kardos is not familiar with rural medicine or plans and problems and situations that rural providers have to deal with. He's managed care — in a larger area, lots of numbers of patients competing ... which is certainly not the environment that we face in Montana," Palagi said.

"For example, [HNA paid] 68 percent reimbursement on our charges. That's what HNA says is the insurance company language of 'customary and reasonable,' quote unquote," Palagi said. "But Blue Cross reimburses us somewhere around 90 percent, if not a little higher, of our charges. And Blue Cross operates in the state [of Montana] and handles payers from all throughout the state as well as others and they reimburse 90 percent of our charges."

Palagi said he will be talking to Stringer to see if the situation can be resolved.

"My plan is to talk with Alan Stringer about this and explore what the reasons might be. I'm not trying to make any kind of judgment about this, but ... we're anxious about the fact that we have to bill the patients," Palagi said.

\*\*\*\*

The newspaper ads that Grace published in April read as follows:

"Ninety days ago, W.R. Grace made a commitment to provide medical coverage as part of our three-part health care program for the people of Libby. The Libby Medical Program is now available.

"Complete coverage"

"All former employees of the Libby mine or mill and their spouses, plus anyone who lived or worked within a 20-mile radius of Libby may qualify for coverage under the Libby Medical Program. The program provides free medical benefits to people diagnosed with a health condition related to asbestos exposure. Once you are enrolled in the program, all eligible medical and pharmacy expenses related to any qualified medical condition will be covered 100 percent."

"Simple to use"

"To enroll in the Libby Medical Program, you and your doctor fill out an application. Once you qualify, you'll receive a temporary ID card right away and permanent medical and pharmacy cards in a few weeks. In most cases, you'll simply show your ID to the doctor, hospital or participating pharmacy and they will bill the program directly. For additional convenience, mail-in pharmacy service is also included. The purpose of the Libby Medical Program is to provide complete coverage for medical care to people with asbestos-related conditions. For more information and complete details about the Libby Medical Program, call Alan Stringer at 406-293-3694."

Lincoln County Health Nurse

## PUBLIC NOTICE

Due to delay in the distribution of influenza vaccine, the Lincoln County Health Department will not be giving flu vaccine until November this year. We will advertise exact dates of clinics as soon as we have vaccine. As there may be a shortage of vaccine, we will only be immunizing high risk people initially. This includes people 65 and older, people with chronic health problems such as those with heart or lung problems, diabetes, anemia, kidney problems, those on long term aspirin therapy, and women in the second or third semester of pregnancy during the influenza season from November to February.

Health care workers and household contacts of the high risk will also be given priority.

Call the Lincoln County Health Department if you have questions at 293-2660. Don't forget, we are now located at 418 Main Avenue, across from the Post Office.



MONTANIAN

OCT 11, 2000

# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q:** I don't have vermiculite in my house but I have other kinds of insulation in my home which may contain asbestos. Does this type of asbestos put me at risk?

**A:** If the insulation does not contain asbestos, then there is no threat of harm from asbestos-related illnesses from exposure to it. However, many types of insulation can be irritating to the skin, nose, throat and lungs.

One sure way to find out about the asbestos content is to have insulation samples collected by a state-accredited inspector and have the samples analyzed by an accredited testing laboratory.

If it contains asbestos but is in good condition, left undisturbed it may not be a problem. For asbestos to present a problem for the homeowner, it must be disturbed so that tiny fibers are released into the air and inhaled or ingested.

As insulation gets older it may deteriorate through normal wear and tear into the kind of tiny airborne fibers that are of concern. If you think that fibers from the insulation may be getting into your living space, then please consult an asbestos expert to have it evaluated and perhaps removed.

In the long term, it is better for a professional to replace old asbestos insulation with more modern insulation. However, containment options such as encapsulation with a sealant or enclosure with sheet rock may be options to delay the expense.

There are specialized firms that are certified in removing asbestos safely. You can locate these firms through your state or county health department.

**For more information or a list of accredited inspectors and abatement specialists call:**  
John Podolinsky or Pierre Amicucci, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, at  
406-444-3490.

More information can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEWS/asbestosinsulation2.html>

<http://www.deq.state.mt.us/Asb-Cont%20List.htm>



# Cleanup could be delayed at least one year

## *Asbestos removal halted as Grace keeps feds at bay*

By David F. Latham,  
editor of The Montanian

10/3/00

Despite pleas for cooperation by county officials and about 90 other community leaders and members, W.R. Grace & Co. continues to keep its newly reacquired mine site and related properties closed to the government, effectively stopping the cleanup of deadly tremolite asbestos near Libby.

Grace says it is concerned about worker safety and alleged chemical contamination of soil that would be returned to the company's property, which was formerly a vermiculite mine.

Meanwhile, many Libby residents want Grace to reopen the site. The Community Advisory Group (CAG) voted unanimously (with 23 members present) at its Sept. 14 meeting to request that Grace cooperate "with all due haste" to give the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency access to Grace property near the Raintree Nursery site, and to Grace's former vermiculite mine site, which the company recently repurchased and then closed.

Also last week, 64 Libby residents signed letters to Grace asking the company to allow the cleanup to continue.

Grace's refusal to cooperate is expected to delay the cleanup until next spring at the earliest, according to the EPA.

Grace contends that the deadly tremolite asbestos waste it left behind after 30 years of mining cannot be returned to its source at the mine because it may be contaminated with horticultural chemicals from Raintree Nursery, which occupied the screening plant site for several years after Grace closed the mine and plant in 1990.

"... there is the question of what, if any, chemicals contaminate the soil the EPA proposes to dump at the former mine site," wrote Alan Stringer, Grace's representative in Libby, in a response Sept. 27 to the CAG. "Since the screening property was a working nursery for the last six years, we assume that some horticultural chemicals were spilled and soaked into the soil. EPA has not told us differently."

But EPA says there is no significant contamination.

"With regard to the horticultural chemicals in the soil at the screening plant [the Raintree Nursery site] and the adjacent properties, EPA is aware of the fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and all those kinds of things," said Wendy Thomi, EPA's community involvement coordinator, in a verbal response to Stringer's letter at the Sept. 28 CAG meeting.

"As we investigated the site we saw [the chemicals] there. They were containerized, very neatly kept, but we did a detailed interview with the Parkers [owners of Raintree Nursery] to determine what their operations were like and how they used those chemicals," Thomi said.

"Based on that interview, it was determined that they used them in containers on the trees and plants they used them on ... they didn't do any large-scale broadcasting of these chemicals to spill them on the ground or just sort of apply them to the ground, and Paul [Peronard of EPA] didn't think that was an issue ..." Thomi said.

"We were satisfied that it wasn't an issue and Grace has raised the point in this letter. They first raised the point last week to the Department of Justice and [Peronard] says it's the first time he's had this issue raised to him," she said.

"What EPA will do now is we'll go ahead if Grace wants us to sample for pesticides, we'll sample for pesticides and fertilizers, etcetera, now that they've raised the issue, and we'll also sample for pesticides and fertilizers and that type of thing up at the mine site," Thomi said.

Grace also contends that it will somehow be liable for EPA workers and contractors while they are on Grace's newly acquired property.

"... we must know who is responsible for the safety of the workers that [sic] will be moving the dirt from the old screening plant to the former mine, if access is granted," Stringer wrote.

"We believe that the EPA should take full responsibility for the safety of its contractors, no matter whose property they are on," Stringer wrote.

Thomi said EPA offers the same range of coverage as is offered on any job site.

"EPA takes great measures to protect the workers and we do it through a variety of methods," Thomi said.

"We have bonds, we have very rigorous health and safety standards, traffic regulations, day-to-day operation, liability insurance, all kinds of things we do to protect both EPA employees and contractors [who] work with us," she said.

The real issue not addressed in Stringer's letter is that Grace doesn't want to pay the cost of insuring workers while the cleanup takes place.

Thomi, however, did address it.

"At superfund sites across the country this issue hasn't come up. It hasn't been an issue before and EPA's position ... is that since EPA is doing this cleanup because of material that Grace left behind, EPA views the costs that are associated with worker safety to be part and parcel of the cleanup costs and therefore, yes, they are Grace's responsibility," Thomi said.

Stringer makes one point in his letter that does not accurately reflect Grace's control of asbestos-contaminated properties near the Kootenai River. He writes: "Grace has no control over the screening plant; in fact, Grace is barred from entering the property."

Grace does however own properties nex to the screening plant and Thomi clarified it in her response.

"With regard to Mr. Stringer saying that Grace has no control over the screening plant, there are three [Grace-owned] properties by the river adjacent to the screening plant that need cleanup. These are controlled by Grace and Grace has denied us access to them," Thomi said.

"Oct. 18 is the date that Paul [Peronard] is looking at for delaying the cleanup on those properties. ... If we don't have access to them by then, the cleanup will wait until next year," Thomi said.

Despite the halt to the cleanup that has been imposed by Grace, Stringer insists that the company wants to cooperate.

"We have tried to negotiate these issues with EPA, but failed. We are open to restarting negotiations, and prefer that course, but are prepared to meet the EPA in court if we must," Stringer wrote.

But Grace's alleged willingness to cooperate has not yet translated itself into meaningful action and the cleanup will probably be delayed well into next year.

"With regard to 'trying to negotiate with EPA', as Mr. Stringer points out in the letter ... Grace was offered the opportunity to view both the cleanups at the export plant [in town] and the screening plant [Raintree Nursery] voluntarily under a consent order, and they refused to do both of those cleanups. So then EPA was forced to issue a unilateral order for [Grace] at the export plant and the Parkers [owners of Raintree Nursery] refused access to Grace and EPA took on the cleanup at [Raintree Nursery]," Thomi said.

"... They have volunteered many times in the newspapers, but when it comes down to actually doing the work and making the agreements, EPA has not been able to accept the conditions that Grace has placed on their doing the work," Thomi said.

In this latest exchange Grace fails to mention that it would have no liability for workers or chemical contamination at the mine site if it hadn't recently bought a controlling interest in Kootenai Development Corp., which is the legal owner of the properties.

Meanwhile, cleanup at the Raintree Nursery site is continuing, although the asbestos-contaminated soil <http://www.libby.org/montanian/page2.html>

cannot be removed.

"With regards to the cleanup, minor amounts of excavation are left to do at the screening plant," Thoni said. "Oct. 1 ... is the deadline [EPA is] looking at for taking the stockpiled soil [contaminated with asbestos] up to the mine site, if we don't have access from Grace," she said.

From 1963 to 1990, Grace operated a vermiculite mine near Libby in which deadly tremolite asbestos was a major waste by-product. Grace operated the mine while knowing about the asbestos danger and took no meaningful steps to warn workers or residents. As a result, at least 88 workers died and at least 300 people are currently diagnosed with terminal asbestos-related illnesses. Persons diagnosed include former workers, their family members, and even people who had no connection to the mine other than to live in Libby.





# ASK EPA!!

## Questions and Answers about Asbestos and EPA's Investigation

**Q: Will EPA have pamphlets warning homeowners and buyer of the possible hazards of living in a home with vermiculite insulation?**

**A:** At this point we do not have enough information showing that just having vermiculite in your home as insulation is dangerous enough for us to issue any national public health warning about vermiculite. However, we are working hard to determine possible risks posed by having asbestos-contaminated insulation in one's home or garden.

Currently, EPA is working on two major activities to better understand the risks from non-occupational exposure to the vermiculite mined in Libby.

1) EPA is revising the risk-assessment methodology to include consideration of the type of asbestos (chrysotile vs. tremolite), the length of the asbestos fibers, and the length-to-width ratio of the fibers. These factors will help scientists determine people's risk of being around even small amounts of tremolite asbestos.

2) EPA is also working on getting new types of analytical techniques approved so that the type, amount and size of asbestos found in a given home can be more accurately measured.

EPA has tested vermiculite products on a national level (including commercially-available insulation). This information was shared with the Consumer Products Safety Commission. The results of the investigation indicate that the potential exposure to asbestos from some vermiculite products poses only a minimal health risk to consumers.

The risk from having an abundance of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in your home remains unclear.

For more information call:

Wendy Thomi at 406-441-1150 x24

# Grace jumps the gun on air quality reports

## *Company issues "enthusiastic" press release about asbestos danger*

By David F. Latham, editor of The Montanian 10/3/00

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is still in the process of determining if Libby and Troy residents are being exposed to dangerous indoor levels of asbestos from vermiculite insulation, contrary to a press release issued Sept. 26 by W.R. Grace & Co.

EPA does say, however, that the outside air around Libby appears to be free of the toxic mineral, although the agency disagrees with Grace on the dangers of short-term versus long-term exposure. "There may be some confusion about that," said Wendy Thomi, EPA's community involvement coordinator, at the Sept. 28 meeting of the Community Advisory Group.

"I know Grace sent out a press release and we got all kinds of calls about what they had said and so I just wanted to clarify a couple of things about ambient air and indoor air," Thomi said.

Grace issued a press release from its headquarters in Columbia, Md., with the headline, "Grace is pleased with latest Libby, Mont., testing results EPA says air monitoring shows no problem with Libby's air quality."

Grace Vice President of Public and Regulatory Affairs Bill Corcoran made two statements in the Grace press release that are not supported by current research.

First, he said, "... asbestos must be inhaled in large quantities over a long period to be dangerous."

He also said, "we are pleased with the results to date of the in-home testing, which shows that the air in Libby homes is no different from the air in homes throughout the country."

EPA disagrees in both cases.

"We support recent statements by the Public Health Service assistant surgeon general expressing concern for even short-term exposure to [tremolite asbestos fibers]. There is concern, which is why [EPA is] putting this much effort into figuring it out. And I say that because of the quote [by Corcoran] that only long-term exposure in very large amounts is dangerous," Thomi said.

Confusion exists because of how Grace chose to interpret a presentation by EPA's on-site coordinator Paul Peronard at the Asbestos and Public Health Conference in Libby Sept. 22-24.

"[Peronard] talked about ... the five ambient air monitors that we have around town. ... He mentioned that they hadn't found any asbestos fibers in the testing they had done on those type monitors," Thomi said.

Those five locations are at the fitness center, McGrade and Plummer schools, City Hall and Jerry Dean Park.

"[EPA is] still are monitoring the perimeter of the cleanup sites," she said.

Those sites are at the Millwork West site next to the baseball fields downtown, and on Hwy. 37 at the Raintree Nursery site.

"Perimeter samples [of asbestos] have not been detected any higher than pre-cleanup levels," Thomi said. "They did find asbestos in the air before the cleanup started but they haven't found anything higher. They've been putting out calcium chloride and water [to reduce dust] and apparently it's effective. ... Because there was some concern in the community that they were potentially exposing community members by doing the cleanup," Thomi said.

"As a matter of fact, [Peronard] said [asbestos fiber] levels [in the air] are lower than when we started work, and to reassure you that residents are not being exposed on account of this cleanup."

Thomi also said that -- contrary to the Grace press release -- EPA is still uncertain about the safety of indoor air in buildings and homes with vermiculite insulation.

"With the indoor air, EPA is still doing its residential exposure assessment ... [and] we haven't really

drawn any conclusions and we're still in that uncomfortable spot of saying 'we don't know' to the constant question of 'is my home safe?' Neither do we want to say 'yes, it is safe' nor do we want to say 'no, everybody should be very alarmed if they have vermiculite in the house,'" she said.

Thomi said EPA is working to overcome this uncertainty as quickly as possible.

"That's the whole point of doing the risk assessment the way they are trying to get it done and doing the new analytical method, the SEM [scanning electron microscope] to be able to say with more confidence what is in people's homes," Thomi said.

Libby City Council member and CAG member George Bauer asked Thomi when the risk assessment will be completed.

"The last time I talked to [EPA toxicologist Dr.] Chris Weis, he said hopefully the new analytical method would be approved by the end of October and I think they were looking at mid-November for getting the peer review together," Thomi said. "It's a public process. It's external folks [people outside the EPA] as well as EPA and a lot of technical people looking at the risk-assessment methods."

Thomi promised to bring more information about the subject to the next CAG meeting.

"I can check again and at the next CAG meeting [Oct. 12] we can see if we have any further update or delay," Thomi said.

From 1963 to 1990, Grace operated a vermiculite mine near Libby in which deadly tremolite asbestos was a significant waste by-product.

Civil court depositions made in 1996 by former mine manager Earl Lovick show that Grace operated the mine while knowing about the asbestos danger and took no meaningful steps to warn workers or residents. As a result, at least 88 workers died and at least 300 people are currently diag-nosed with terminal asbestos-related illnesses. Persons diagnosed include former workers, their family members, and even people who had no connection to the mine other than to live in Libby.

A former financial analyst for Grace said in an interview last week with The Montanian that company executives knew workers would die and decided in corporate planning sessions to set aside hundreds of millions of dollars as early as 1982 to pay off their survivors as civil lawsuits were filed.

Grace's representative in Libby, Alan Stringer, confirms in a letter to The Montanian this week that such planning sessions took place "every year."

The number of persons diag-nosed with terminal asbestos-related diseases is expected to rise when the results of a town-wide screening are made available.

# Grace medical plan:

*First payments leave asbestos victims with unpaid hospital bills*

By David F. Latham,  
editor of The Montanian

10/3/00

St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby has received its first payment from the medical plan offered by W.R. Grace & Co. for medical services to asbestos patients, and the plan falls short of the company's pledge to pay "100 percent" of victims' medical bills.

According to hospital CEO Rick Palagi, the hospital received its first notice of payment last week.

"We have received one remittance notice ... on two patients who had charges and it appears that the plan pays about 68 percent of those patient charges, leaving the balance to be picked up by patients," Palagi said in an interview Sept. 29.

The two patients will receive bills totaling \$338.65, Palagi said.

"These couple of patients have a bill and I'm required by law to bill them," he said.

The Grace medical plan is administered by Health Network America (HNA), a privately owned and operated company in New Jersey.

Palagi said the patients could submit the unpaid balance to their insurance companies but not Medicare.

"The patients' recourse would be, if they have other kinds of insurance, they could submit the balance to that insurance," Palagi said. "My understanding would be, they couldn't submit this to Medicare because it was submitted to HNA first and Medicare requires that you submit to them first."

Palagi said there were no ineligible expenses and the plan paid at least part of every expense that was submitted, but paid the hospital less than it charged on several items.

"For example, there was a chest x-ray, single view, done at the bedside with a portable machine. Our usual charge for that is \$147 and [HNA] said they would pay \$59," Palagi said.

The conflict arises from the prices the hospital charges versus what HNA says they will pay.

Grace's representative in Libby, Alan Stringer, said Libby's hospital just charges too much for some services.

"There is an issue here with some of the charges the hospital has made," Stringer said in an interview Sept. 29. "Our program says it will pay 100 percent of [what is] reasonable and customary. No plan, no insurance, nobody out there can in clear conscience pay 100 percent of what anybody wants to charge," Stringer said.

"The plan has said from the beginning it will pay 100 percent of what is reasonable and customary," Stringer said. "You have to ask the hospital why are their charges so much higher than what is reasonable and customary for ... the Libby area."

Stringer says the 'reasonable and customary' clause is stated plainly in the plan and there was never any attempt to conceal it.

"It's right up front in the plan. People should take a look and read what the plan says," Stringer said.

Grace spent several tens of thousands of dollars in April to advertise its medical plan in newspapers across Montana, including The Montanian. The ads said the company would pay "100 percent of medical expenses" but the company made no reference to 'reasonable and customary' in the ads.

The almost-full-page ads read as follows:

"Ninety days ago, W.R. Grace made a commitment to provide medical coverage as part of our three-part health care program for the people of Libby. The Libby Medical Program is now available.

## "Complete coverage"

"All former employees of the Libby mine or mill and their spouses, plus anyone who lived or worked

within a 20-mile radius of Libby may qualify for coverage under the Libby Medical Program. The program provides free medical benefits to people diagnosed with a health condition related to asbestos exposure. Once you are enrolled in the program, all eligible medical and pharmacy expenses related to any qualified medical condition will be covered 100 percent.

### **"Simple to use"**

"To enroll in the Libby Medical Program, you and your doctor fill out an application. Once you qualify, you'll receive a temporary ID card right away and permanent medical and pharmacy cards in a few weeks. In most cases, you'll simply show your ID to the doctor, hospital or participating pharmacy and they will bill the program directly. For additional convenience, mail-in pharmacy service is also included. The purpose of the Libby Medical Program is to provide complete coverage for medical care for people with asbestos-related conditions. For more information and complete details about the Libby Medical Program, call Alan Stringer at 406-293-3694."

\* \* \*

The widespread perception at the time the ads came out was that patients would not incur any expenses of their own.

"[That perception] was really incorrect," said Dr. Steve Kardos, M.D., a pediatrician and the CEO, owner and founder of HNA, the company that administers the Grace medical plan.

"I think the word 'eligible' in there is really what is important," Kardos said. "The purpose of this plan ... is to provide health benefits to all of the people who were exposed and have become eligible for participation in the plan under the definitions of who is covered in the plan, and the eligibility is spelled out in the plan document," Kardos said.

"In addition to that, the fees ... that are going to be paid by the plan are defined in the plan and they are based on the amount of ... usual and customary charge as determined by ... the greater fee from two national fee schedules, one being the Medical Data Research Institute fee schedule, and the other is the Health Insurance Association of America," Kardos said.

"The fee schedule, which is based upon 'usual and customary,' the percentile that Grace has opted as the administrator of the plan to pay is the highest of the fee schedules that has been collected by these two data sources," he said.

"For instance, in the bills that have been submitted for payment by the physicians and the hospital for the most part, all of their fees have been [paid] in full as defined by the fee schedules that are being used by Grace. They're very high," Kardos said.

"The one instance in which we found an exorbitant fee, it was not paid and it was paid at the 90th percentile. It was a radiology fee charged by the hospital for a single-view x-ray for \$147 we believe, and that was paid at the 90th percentile ... for that procedure at a hospital," Kardos said.

Limits have to be set to prevent exploitation of the plan, Kardos said.

"The reason that a fee schedule is absolutely necessary in the administration of this plan, which was chosen to be a very, very rich one, is because then ... Grace would be getting bills and charges submitted that would be beyond reason and there would be no limit to what anybody could charge for any fee," he said.

"This plan has been implemented and executed by our company in a way that is far richer than any other plan that we administer ... so for ... anyone to suggest that this fee schedule is not living up to the promise is really sad because it doesn't indicate really what the dynamics are that are going on," Kardos said.

Palagi said he will be talking to Stringer to see if the situation can be resolved.

"My plan is to talk with Alan Stringer about this and explore what the reasons might be. I'm not trying

to make any kind of judgment about this, but ... we're anxious about the fact that we have to bill the patients," Palagi said.